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The 2007 Education Next–PEPG Survey

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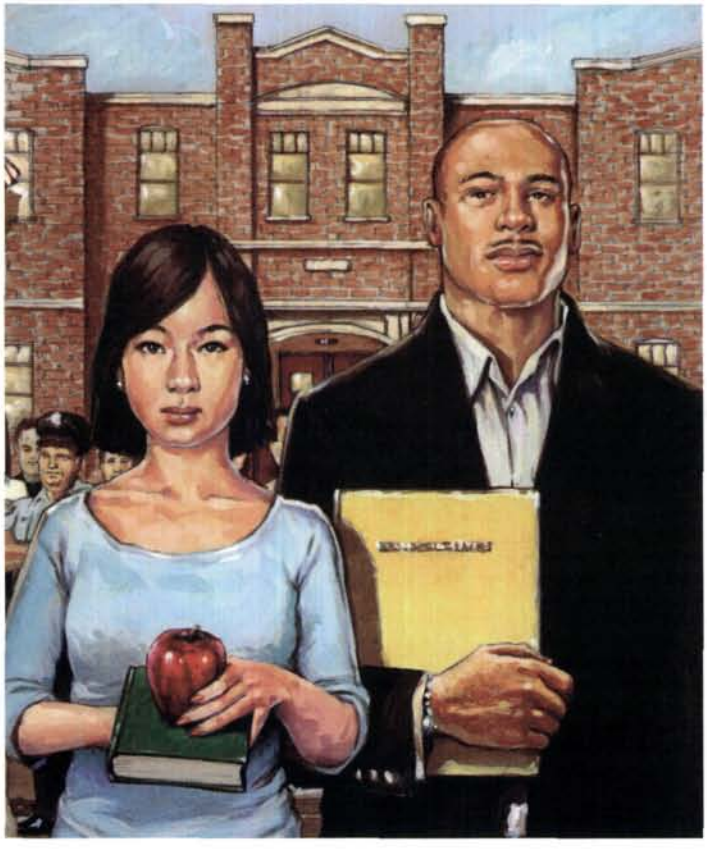

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Sizing Up NCLB, Do Better Neighborhoods Make Better Students? Funding Inequities in Texas, Can Schools Overcome Heredity and Environment? Parents' Right to Sue

CONTRIBUTORS: LISA SANBONMATSU, JEFFREY KLING, STEFANIE DELUCA, JAY GREENE, MARGUERITE ROZA, DIANNE PICHÉ, NATHAN GLAZER, DIANE RAVITCH, DAVID STEINER

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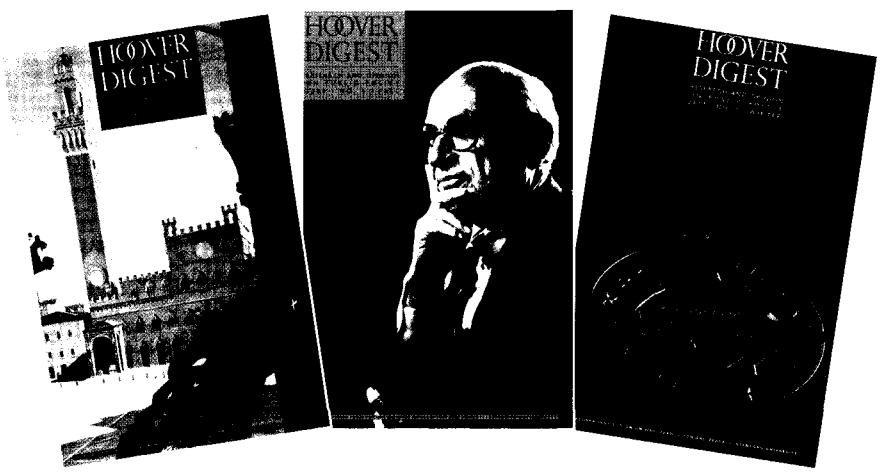

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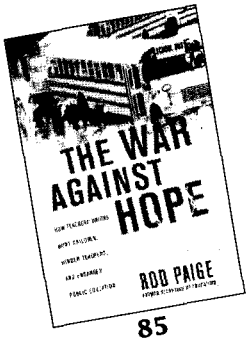

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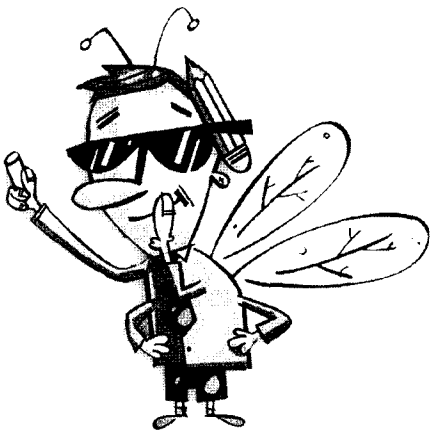
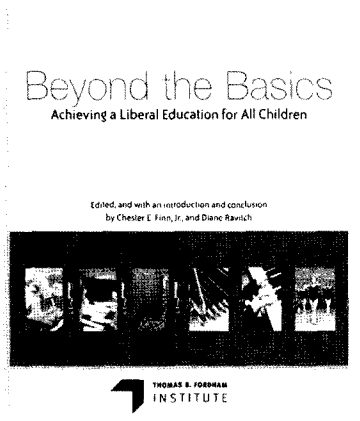


Weekly news and analysis from the Education Gadfly


Beyond the Basics
Achieving a Liberal Education for All Children
Edited, and with an introduction and conclusion by Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Diane Ravitch
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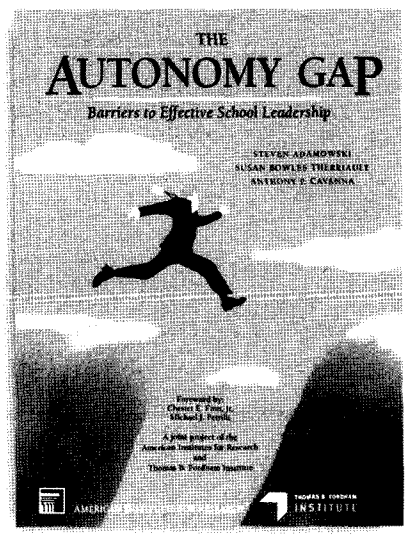

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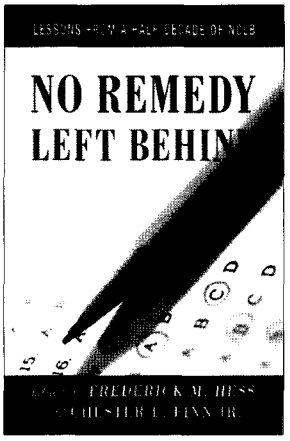
LESSONS FROM A HALF-DECADE OF NCLB

NO REMEDY LEFT BEHIND

EDITED BY FREDERICK M. HESS AND CHESTER E. FINN JR.



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"*No Remedy Left Behind* is a sobering and important look at the nation's basic federal education law governing K–12 schools. No hysterics, no ranting, just a careful and objective examination of how the No Child Left Behind law is working—and not working."

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Good News for Presidential Candidates

The public supports a wide range of education reforms

Put foreign policy first, theorist Niccolò Machiavelli once advised his 16th-century Florentine prince. It's not bad advice for 21st-century presidential candidates, either. National security, not education, will be the overriding issue in the 2008 campaign, even if the Gates and Broad Foundations succeed with Strong American Schools, their $60 million quest to place education front and center.

Still, schools will not be missing from the political agenda altogether. So long as the economy perks along and no one wants to cut Social Security or raise taxes on more than a few, then health care and education will be the top domestic issues. Clearly, no presidential issues kit can afford to be without an education page.

Too often candidates let vested interests and insistent advocates provide the content for that document. Many Democrats, for example, are currying favor with union interests by insisting on less student testing and more federal funding. "While the children are getting good at filling in all those little bubbles, what exactly are they really learning?" Senator Hillary Clinton asked delegates at a meeting of the New Hampshire chapter of the National Education Association late last May. "How much creativity are we losing? How much of our children's passion is being killed?" Meanwhile, one is hearing in Republican circles a great deal about getting Washington off the states' backs.

That may make political sense in the early days of a campaign when the opinions of the few count more than those of the many. Eventually, though, the next president must win support from a broad cross-section of voters across the country.

On education matters, a heap of valuable information can be found in the poll results presented in this issue. Shrewd candidates will scrutinize the hundreds of numbers set forth on pages 13 to 26 to extract the political truths buried within. To guide their search, I offer five basic themes that percolate through many of the answers potential voters have given:

More people support accountability than any other single education reform.

1. Although the public supports its public schools, it finds them mediocre at best, deserving no more than a grade of C.
2. People want to remedy that situation but are not nearly so doctrinaire as powerful interests and political elites. Ordinary voters are pragmatists, willing to try many different things, whether it be accountability, school choice, smaller classes, more spending, or rewarding good teachers.
3. More people support accountability than any other single education reform. If they do not trust all of the utopian promises offered by NCLB, neither do they want the federal government to abandon its efforts to hold state and local school officials to account. On the contrary, the public would expand accountability systems in several directions:
   a. Create national standards to replace state-specific ones.
   b. Demand that students pass high school exams before graduating.
   c. Evaluate and reward teachers according to how much their students are learning.
4. The public wants schools, students, and teachers to be treated fairly. Money should be spent equally on different types of schools, different types of students, and across the board on all teachers, unless there are convincing reasons to do otherwise. Even extra rewards to effective teachers win only a moderately positive endorsement.
5. The public does not oppose school choice, but doesn't know much about charter schools. A charter platform will need a lot of explaining.

All this is good news for responsible aspiring leaders. From among the options available, the correct policies can be selected, and if persuasively described, perhaps even implemented post-election. May the best leader win.

— Paul E. Peterson

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K-12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.

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Evidence-based Studies

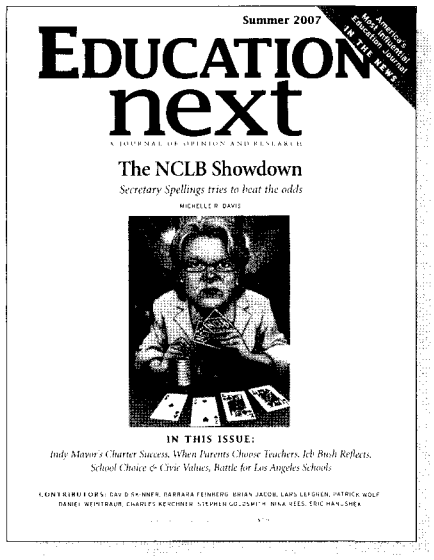
We are accustomed to spirited intellectual debate and critique, but not to the kind of misinformation in Eric Hanushek's article ("The Confidence Men," *check the facts*, Summer 2007). We'd like to set the record straight.

First, our adequacy reports were prepared for state education agencies, and legislative and gubernatorially created task forces, not plaintiffs.

Second, we have never added effect sizes to estimate the effectiveness of our model's recommendations. We provide effect sizes to show strength of program impacts and to help establish funding priorities. We stated this in our response to Hanushek's earlier critique of our Washington study, which is widely available, and told him so verbally. And none of the effect sizes should be linked to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), but to the tests associated with each study, where the performance implications of a given effect size are much smaller. Nor have we ever stated that all of our recommendations must be implemented simultaneously. We routinely recommend gradual phase-in of funding for reforms.

Our model is based on existing research. While each report begins with that research, it is modified through an extensive series of meetings with state policymakers and education professionals. The result is a unique document that meets each state's individual needs.

Hanushek implies that our recommendations will cost most states a bundle. That is not true; using national average prices and national student demographics, a new paper we have written finds that our recommendations can be funded at the national average expenditure per pupil. Hanushek overstates the cost of many of our contracts and fails to note that usually the work includes additional studies to assist policymakers in developing funding systems for high-performing schools.


Summer 2007
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A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH
The NCLB Showdown
Secretary Spellings tries to beat the odds
MICHELLE R. DAVIS
IN THIS ISSUE:
Indy Mayor's Charter Success, When Parents Choose Teachers, Jeb Bush Reflects,
School Choice & Civic Values, Battle for Los Angeles Schools

In second-round studies in Washington and in Wisconsin, we found several schools that have dramatically improved student performance using approaches similar to those recommended in our evidence-based reports. Research-based practice has improved many other fields, including medicine, and offers the same promise in education. Yes, more education research is needed, but we should apply what we have learned to date to help improve our schools. The fact that half of the states that have implemented school funding systems relied on "costing out" studies based on the evidence-based method suggests the strength of our approach.

Our goal is to help each state improve learning for all children. Hanushek seems to believe nothing will work within the current system. We disagree.

LAWRENCE O. PICUS
ALLAN ODDEN
Picus and Associates

Hanushek responds:

I join with Professors Picus and Odden in seeking effective school-finance policies. The difficulty is that education research varies widely in quality, reliability, and policy usefulness. Policymakers quite reasonably look for expert advice in judging various claims and suggested policies, but have not received it in the evidence-based studies. Picus and Odden's own "validation studies" for Washington and Wyoming make the point. They find "several schools that have dramatically improved student performance using approaches similar to those recommended in our evidence-based reports." But they do not show that all or even most districts using their approaches improve. Nor do they show that districts generally fail to improve without their approaches. Most important, they have no way of determining that introduction of the "similar approaches" was the *cause* of improvement, as opposed to being just present when other systematic or idiosyncratic factors promoted improvement in these several schools.

Medicine is an apt comparison, because that field generally applies strict scientific standards when judging evidence, as contrasted to education, where many inferior research designs are given equal standing. My critique simply shows that their "evidence" is not credible. Moreover, any method that completely ignores costs when judging policies lacks merit.

Los Angeles Update

Since these articles ("Power Struggle in Los Angeles," *forum*, Summer 2007) were written, Los Angeles mayor Villaraigosa has publicly announced that he will not continue to press the courts to support his legislation. And the mayor's slate of candidates for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) school board has won, providing the mayor with a slim majority of allies (four of seven).

I have a unique perspective, having been both an assistant deputy mayor and the elected LAUSD president. What we are seeing is a renaissance of public education being led by the people. For example, in May the majority of the

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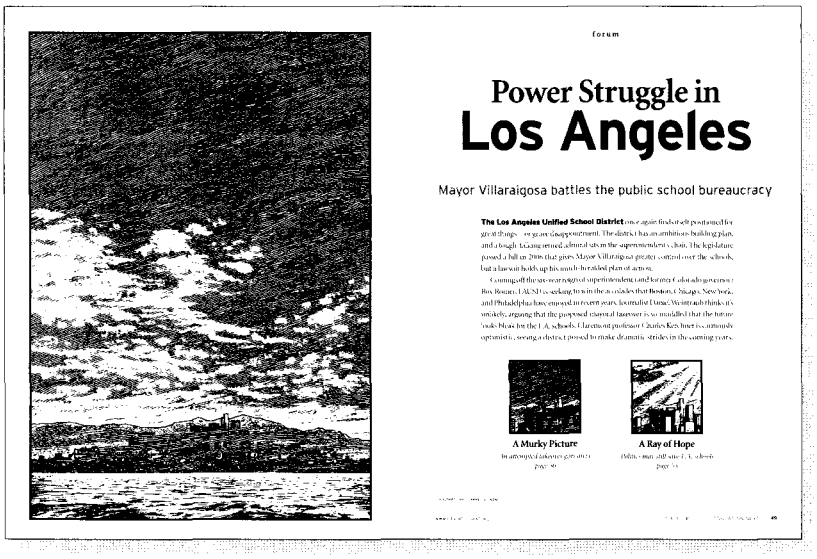
tenured teachers at Locke High School, one of LAUSD's most troubled schools, voted to become an independent charter school. Significantly, they voted to opt out of LAUSD's teachers' union in favor of the more progressive Maestros Unidos, a California Teachers Association (CTA) affiliate. Across the district, parents, teachers, administrators, and students are demanding more independence from the central bureaucracy. New leaders are focusing on rigor, quality, and deepening the relationships that support excellence. They are taking responsibility.

The question is whether the mayor's efforts will provide the depth of challenge to the entrenched system required to drive real student achievement. His comprehensive plan didn't mention charter schools as part of the solution, although it was written by a former charter school leader and the stage was filled with charter school students at the press unveiling. The new team can choose to support this collective public action by providing facilities, cutting red tape, and making the academic outcomes transparent, but doing so will require the courage to honor the initiative of the people above the interests of the establishment.

CAPRICE YOUNG
President and CEO
California Charter Schools Association

Invest in Indianapolis

David Skinner's article ("Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson," *features*, Summer 2007) aptly describes Indianapolis's efforts to reform and improve public education. The legislature's leadership and commitment for the past six years, combined with Mayor Peterson's and Ball State University's ability to authorize charters (and willingness to do so), along with reform-minded superintendents such as Eugene White working to improve the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS), demonstrate to the country's education reformers that Indianapolis is prime territory for innovation and investment.


forum

Power Struggle in
Los Angeles

Mayor Villaraigosa battles the public school bureaucracy

The Los Angeles Unified School District once again finds itself portrayed for great things—or gross disappointment. The district has an ambitious building plan, and a tough-talking mixed-ethnic mix in the superintendent's chair. The legislature passed a bill in 2006 that gives Mayor Villaraigosa greater control over the schools, but a lawsuit holds up his much-heralded plan of action.

Coming off the ever-escalating of superintendent (and former education czar) Ray Rodrigues, LAUSD is seeking to win the accolades that Boston, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia have enjoyed in recent years. Journalist Diane Weintraub thinks it's unlikely, arguing that the proposed financial takeover is so muddled that the future looks bleak for the L.A. schools. Claremont professor Charles Kerchner is cautiously optimistic, seeing a district poised to make dramatic strides in the coming years.

A Murky Picture
In an mayor's takeover gets always
page 40

A Ray of Hope
Odds—and All—are L.A. schools
page 44

It is worth noting that all the good that Indianapolis is producing is even more stunning because of the relatively low level of private funding committed to charter schools. The Lilly Endowment remains mum on charter schools. Many corporate headquarters have moved out of Indianapolis and Indiana altogether, and they have taken their philanthropic attention and dollars with them. Thus, in addition to the political leaders, the real leaders in Indianapolis and all of Indiana are the few private donors who have supported education reformers in developing their dream schools. Without these two pieces of the puzzle, the school innovators and the funders, the charter school law would still just be a law on the books.

With leaders all across the country increasingly recognizing the power of charter schools to transform public education, increased attention on Indianapolis by national funders, as well as an infusion of efforts from school reform groups such as Teach For America, New Leaders for New Schools, and CMOs and EMOs seeking to grow, could tip the scales in Indianapolis and begin to improve public education for all children in the city.

KEVIN TEASLEY
President and founder
Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation

Adequacy Suits

In "Adequately Fatigued" (*legal beat*, Summer 2007), Joshua Dunn and Martha Derthick describe court decisions in Texas, Massachusetts, and New York that suggest the courts may be growing weary of educational adequacy cases. They significantly understate their case. Eleven other adequacy cases

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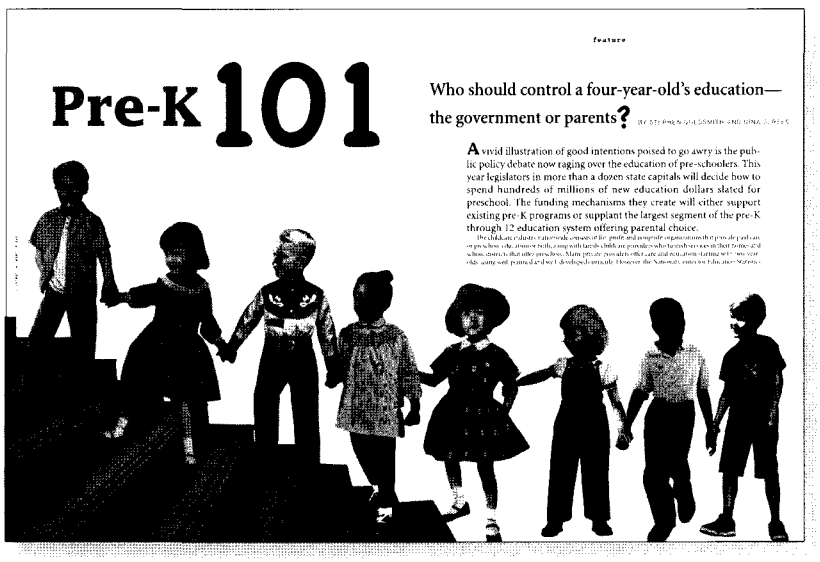
feature
Pre-K 101
Who should control a four-year-old's education—the government or parents?
A vivid illustration of good intentions poised to go awry is the public policy debate now raging over the education of pre-schoolers. This year legislators in more than a dozen state capitals will decide how to spend hundreds of millions of new education dollars slated for preschool. The funding mechanisms they create will either support existing pre-K programs or supplant the largest segment of the pre-K through 12 education system offering parental choice.

have also been decided in the last two years. Only in New Hampshire have plaintiffs enjoyed any significant success.

In the other ten cases, the results have been largely disappointing for plaintiffs. In Oklahoma, Indiana, Nebraska, Colorado, Oregon, and Kentucky, the courts ruled that the amount of educational funding is a political question for the legislature, not the courts, to decide. In Arizona, the courts dismissed the case, concluding that the state had no liability for achievement disparities it had not caused. A trial court upheld the adequacy of South Carolina's K–12 education system, approving only a claim related to pre-K programs. In the latest trial in Wyoming, the court rejected the most significant of plaintiffs' claims, granting them relatively minor relief. Most recently, an Alaska trial court ruled that plaintiffs had failed to prove inadequate school funding in that state, holding only that more state oversight over how some districts spent their money was needed. This was hardly the result plaintiff school districts could have wanted.

The track record of the last two years is a discouraging one for plaintiffs considering filing an adequacy lawsuit. Rather than the courts, it has been through the often maligned legislative process that advocates for increased funding for schools have had the most success. Most notably, legislatures in New York, North Dakota, and Wyoming significantly increased K–12 education appropriations in the last year, but only after plaintiffs' court claims for significantly increased funding had either ended or been rejected.

ALFRED A. LINDSETH
Partner
Sutherland Asbill & Brennan

Pre-K for All

"Pre-K 101" (*features*, Summer 2007) sets up a false choice between schools and community child-care centers as the providers of pre-K. The reality is that we need both, and this debate shouldn't be allowed to sidetrack one of the most dramatic improvements in the nation's education system in the past decade. Six years ago, the Pew Charitable Trusts launched a national initiative aimed at helping states provide access to high-quality pre-kindergarten for every three- and four-year-old whose parents want it for them. Since then, the movement for pre-K has truly taken hold, with 29 governors recommending more than $800 million in new spending this past spring, and growing numbers of farsighted states making pre-kindergarten available to all three- and four-year-olds.

Underlying any decisions about how to structure early education has to be a discussion of what will be of greatest benefit to the children, and quality is the key. Private child-care providers can be an essential part of a comprehensive network of facilities providing high-quality pre-K. This year, Iowa, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Texas have proposals on the table that embrace providing pre-K in diverse settings. Indeed, the majority of states that have embraced pre-K build on the success of community-based providers and give parents choices among school-based, church-based, for-profit, and nonprofit child-care centers. And there are good reasons for this: parents get choices, and states can serve far more children than schools alone can possibly accommodate.

SUSAN URAHN
Managing Director

SARA WATSON
Senior Officer
State Policy Initiatives
The Pew Charitable Trusts

Teacher Dispositions

"Return of the Thought Police?" (*research*, Spring 2007) says there is a growing "approach to teacher education and certification based on ideology rather than teaching skills or mastery of content knowledge." The author, Laurie Moses Hines, teaches cultural foundations of education at Kent State University, a National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)-accredited institution. Were she to visit with faculty who are preparing accreditation program reports in their respective disciplines of mathematics, science, English, foreign

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language, and other areas, she would better understand the depth and breadth of content knowledge and its application for teaching that candidates must demonstrate. This is the focus of NCATE: teachers who know the content they plan to teach and how to teach it effectively so that students learn.

Regarding dispositions, NCATE expects institutions to ensure that candidates "demonstrate dispositions that value fairness and learning by all students." In addition to these commonsense expectations, institutions may develop other dispositions that fit their mission. NCATE refers institutions to licensing standards for professional educators adopted or adapted by most of the states. Institutions often identify dispositions that encourage pre-service educators to be caring teachers, lifelong learners, and reflective practitioners. Institutions are encouraged to measure dispositions by translating them into observable behaviors in school settings.

NCATE believes that the development of professional dispositions is an important component of pre-service education. NCATE does not expect or require institutions to inculcate candidates with any particular social or political ideology. We hope that the record has been set straight so that we all can continue the important job of preparing the next generation of highly qualified educators who can work successfully with all students.

ARTHUR E. WISE
President
National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

Educational Software

The statement by Todd Oppenheimer in "Selling Software" (*features*, Spring 2007) that Renaissance Learning's Accelerated Reader has not been "held up to serious scrutiny" is simply inaccurate. There currently are several articles on Accelerated Reader that are either published in or in press with peer-reviewed journals. The peer-review process that determines whether an article will be published subjects manuscripts to the utmost scrutiny.

One of our studies was a randomized trial in a large urban district that found significant positive effects on reading achievement for students who used Accelerated Reader according to the publisher's recommendations. This study was published more than a year ago in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk.* Other studies have included large quasi-experiments that also reported generally positive outcomes for Accelerated Reader users, one of which is in press with another peer-reviewed publication (*Research in the Schools*). Beyond our studies, we are aware of several other refereed articles on Accelerated Reader dating back to the 1990s.

NCATE expects institutions to ensure candidates "demonstrate dispositions that value fairness and learning by all students."

In addition, the author made a serious omission by not drawing distinctions between very different types of educational software. The bulk of the article was dedicated to integrated learning systems (ILS), in which the student sits at the computer and receives instruction through the technology rather than from a teacher and also may complete exercises and assessments.

Accelerated Reader is not an ILS. It's a progress-monitoring system that encourages book reading and helps the teacher guide, monitor, and personalize student reading practice. Students read books and then use Accelerated Reader to take comprehension quizzes covering what they have read. Students have reading quantity and comprehension goals, and the software tracks their progress against those goals. The distinction between an ILS (to provide instruction) and a progress-monitoring assessment system is a critical one.

STEVEN M. ROSS
Center for Research in Educational Policy
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In "Selling Software," Todd Oppenheimer opines that none of the studies on Accelerated Reader have held up to serious scrutiny. However, there is consensus among three key federally funded agencies (What Works Clearinghouse, National Center on Student Progress Monitoring, and Florida Center for Reading Research), as well as several peer-reviewed journal articles that review research on education products, that Accelerated Reader has met high standards of scientific rigor with positive effects and no contrary evidence.

For 21 years Accelerated Reader has helped teachers hold students in grades K–12 accountable for their reading practice. What other educational product has withstood the test of time like that? For more than two decades, Accelerated Reader has made a consistent, reliable, and replicable contribution to the classroom.

STEVEN A. SCHMIDT
President and COO
Renaissance Learning, Inc.

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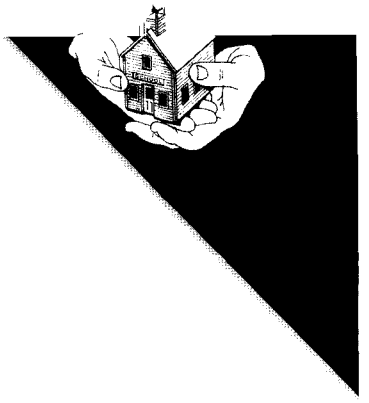

The Enforcers

Parents may gain right to sue over NCLB

BY JOSHUA DUNN AND MARTHA DERTHICK

Adversarial legalism, which has become the American way of government, is likely sooner or later to be wedded to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which embodies America's hope for closing the achievement gap. Two advocacy groups have urged that the match take place now, in the impending reauthorization of NCLB.

One proposal comes from the Education Trust, which has a 17-year track record of commitment to school reform.

The Ed Trust proposes that parents of children in Title I schools, those that have a disadvantaged population and are the main recipients of federal funds, be vested with a private right of action "to enforce their rights under the law." The rights that the Trust names are of two kinds. One is for access to data on funding patterns, teacher distributions, and high school graduation rates. The other is for participation in school-level decisions about allocation of supplemental educational services funds, for example, whether to use them for tutoring or expanded in-school instruction.

The fact is that for decades litigants have been marching through the courthouse door to influence what happens in schools.

If the Ed Trust proposal imprudently invites lawsuits from aggrieved parents on a few specific topics, it appears quite restrained when compared to the superhighway to the courtroom concocted by the No Child Left Behind Commission, which offers an unlimited array of statutory language to an unlimited universe of potential litigants. Sponsored by the Aspen Institute, a think tank with global aspirations, the 15-member commission was co-chaired by two former governors, Tommy G. Thompson of Wisconsin and Roy E. Barnes of Georgia, and included the law dean at the University of California at Berkeley, Christopher Edley, who is a leading advocate of private rights of action in education.

In contrast to the Education Trust's willingness to call a spade a spade and specify its use, the commission proposal is a Pandora's box wrapped in a euphemism and tied with red tape. Rather than a private right of action, it speaks of "enhanced enforcement options" for parents and "other concerned parties." Plaintiffs could sue "to enforce the law," namely NCLB, which is a statute of immense scope and complexity, laden with problematic and sharply contested features, not likely to become simpler in revision.

However, the aggrieved parties would not get to court immediately. There are a lot of bureaucratic stops on the Aspen superhighway. The commission proposal would require states to define procedures by which complainants would bring grievances against local districts or the state itself to a state agency. If the state rejected a complaint, the complaining party could appeal to the U.S. Department of Education (ED), which would be empowered to select the "complaints worthy of response or needing clarifying rulings." The ED could order a state to respond, but if the department elected not to hear an appeal, the complainant could file suit in state court, an odd approach for a federal law to take, given that in our federal system the United States does not define the jurisdiction of state courts.

Edley has complained, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle* (February 14, 2007), that parents and the public cannot get in the courthouse door to argue that officials are failing to live up to the obligations of education statutes: "If the state fails to enforce environmental regulations against a polluter, members of the public can not only go to the ballot box, they can also go to court. That's true in countless areas, and it ought to be true in education."

But the fact is that for decades litigants have been marching through the courthouse door to influence what happens in schools. They did so to achieve racial desegregation. They do so today for countless purposes, typically to claim a right to free and edgy speech on T-shirts or banners under the First Amendment, to assert rights to education of the handicapped under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and to ask for more school spending under state constitutional provisions that are said to guarantee an equitable or an adequate education.

Attaching private rights of action to NCLB would not open the courthouse door for the first time, but would open it much wider.

Joshua Dunn is assistant professor at the University of Colorado–Colorado Springs. Martha Derthick is professor emeritus at the University of Virginia.

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What Americans Think about

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Their Schools

ILLUSTRATION / BILL GARLAND

Americans both care about their schools and want them to improve. Though adults give the nation's public schools only mediocre grades—a plurality confer a "C"—they are willing to invest more money in public education and they are reasonably confident that doing so will improve student learning. They are also open to a host of school reforms ranging from high-stakes student accountability to merit pay for teachers to school vouchers and tax credits that would give low-income families greater access to private schools. By sizable margins, they back reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal law that mandates school accountability.

The public, however, also appears selective in its desire for change. Americans balk at some market-based reforms, such as paying more for teachers who work in fields like math and science, where quality teachers are in scarce supply. And substantial percentages remain undecided about charter schools and other reform initiatives, suggesting that the current national debate over school policy has the potential to sway public opinion in one direction or another.

The 2007 Education Next-PEPG Survey

All this—and more—is indicated by a new national survey of U.S. adults conducted under the auspices of *Education Next* and the Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG) at Harvard University. (For survey methodology, see sidebar on page 26.) Here we report the opinions of both the public at large and three ethnic subgroups (whites, African Americans, and Hispanics). We also distinguish the views of those who have worked for the public schools from those who have not. Except for opinions on school choice issues, differences across ethnic groups are generally smaller than those between public school employees and those who have never been employed by the schools. Responses to survey questions are provided at the bottom of the ensuing pages.

BY WILLIAM G. HOWELL, MARTIN R. WEST, AND PAUL E. PETERSON

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Accountability

Perhaps the most popular school reforms are those that hold students and schools to account for their performance. Accountability policies take many forms, but the public generally supports the concept in all its guises, including the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

No Child Left Behind

On the most high-profile issue of the day—the debate over extending the life of NCLB—a majority of those polled indicate that they support the law's reauthorization with no more than minor changes (see Figure 1). NCLB requires states to establish performance standards in math and reading; to test students against those standards annually in grades 3 to 8 and again when students are in high school; and to intervene in schools that fail to make adequate annual progress toward the goal of near-universal student proficiency by 2014. The 2002 law is scheduled for reauthorization this year.

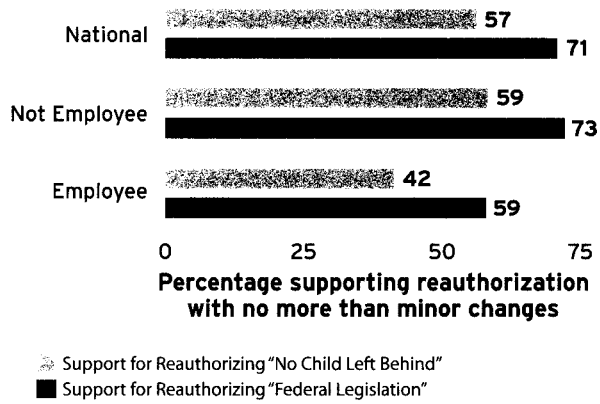
Despite NCLB's bipartisan origins, controversy has beset the statute ever since its passage. The law places unprecedented demands on the states, several of which have passed resolutions critical of it. Reporting on recent grass-roots efforts to overturn the law, *Time* magazine noted that "more than 30,000 educators and concerned citizens have signed an online petition calling for the repeal of the 1,100 page statute."

It is perhaps surprising, then, that the American public holds NCLB in reasonably high regard. When asked for their view on the matter, 57 percent of respondents prefer that Congress renew the act either as is or with minimal changes. Still, the intense debate over NCLB appears to be eroding public support for the law as a symbol. When NCLB is described as "federal legislation" rather than mentioned by name, as was the case for a randomly selected half of our survey respondents, support for extending its accountability provisions rises to 71 percent (Q. 1a, 1b).

Similar levels of support are observed across ethnic lines, with never less than one-half of African Americans, Hispanics, or whites recommending that Congress renew the act as is or with minor changes, regardless of how the question is asked. Current and former public school employees, however, consistently register lower levels of support for NCLB.

NCLB (Figure 1)

Fifty-seven percent of American adults support the renewal of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) with only minor changes, but only 42 percent of current or former public school employees do. Support for reauthorization is markedly higher when the law is described as federal legislation.



No Child Left Behind

1a. As you may know, the No Child Left Behind Act requires states to set standards in math and reading and to test students each year to determine whether the standards are being met. This year, Congress is deciding whether to renew the No Child Left Behind Act. What do you think Congress should do? Should they...

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee? (Past or Present)	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Renew the Act as is	31%	28%	43%	42%	33%	20%
Renew with minimal changes	26	29	19	18	26	22
Renew with major changes	25	23	31	23	23	32
Not renew at all	18	20	6	17	17	25

1b. As you may know, federal legislation requires states to set standards in math and reading and to test students each year to determine whether the standards are being met. This year, Congress is deciding whether to renew this federal legislation. What do you think Congress should do? Should they...

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Renew the Act as is	37%	36%	50%	31%	39%	30%
Renew with minimal changes	34	37	21	32	34	29
Renew with major changes	18	16	20	21	16	26
Not renew at all	11	11	9	16	11	16

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National Standards

Just because the public favors reauthorization of NCLB does not mean that it opposes efforts to amend the act by establishing a single national standard. Currently, NCLB asks each state to set its own standards, design and administer its own tests, and establish its own definition of student proficiency. A number of prominent Washington think tanks, including the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and the Center for American Progress, have argued that proficiency standards vary so widely that they should be replaced by a single national definition. But other groups, on both the right and the left of the political spectrum, oppose any single standard as unnecessary federal intrusion into local matters. Given the controversy surrounding all proposals to establish a uniform national standard, it is noteworthy that nearly three-quarters of the American public support the concept (Q. 2).

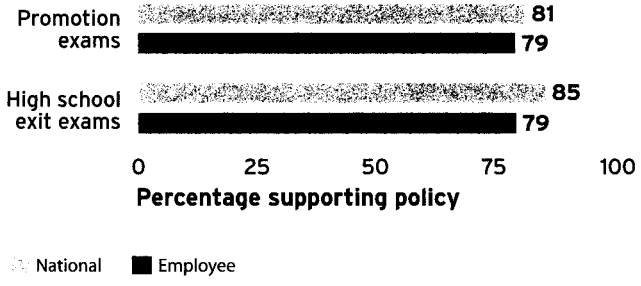
Student Accountability

Separate and apart from NCLB, which focuses on the performance of schools and districts, the public strongly supports reforms designed to hold individual students accountable for their performance on state tests. Currently, only a few states (e.g., Florida) and cities (e.g., Chicago and New York) require students to pass a test in order to move from one grade to the next, thereby modifying the practice of "social promotion," which keeps youngsters with their peers by passing them to the next grade regardless of academic performance. Twenty-three states currently require students to pass an examination in order to graduate from high school, but the rest, a group that includes Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, do not.

Despite the fact that holding students accountable for their performance is far from a universal practice in American education, student accountability commands widespread public support (see Figure 2). No less than 81 percent of all respondents support requiring students in certain grades to pass an exam before they proceed to the next grade, and 85 percent support requiring students to pass an exam before graduating from high school. Only 10 percent of respondents oppose either policy. African Americans, Hispanics, and current and former school employees are all modestly less likely to support graduation exams than other respondents, but in no case does more than 16 percent of a subgroup oppose the policy (Q. 3, 4).

Although Americans appear quite willing to use test results to determine the pace of students' progress through school, they are less enthusiastic about using them to open

High-Stakes Testing (Figure 2)
Both the public at large and public school employees support student accountability measures ending social promotion and establishing high school graduation exams.



National Standards

2. Under No Child Left Behind, should there be a single national standard and a single national test for all students in the United States? Or do you think that there should be different standards and tests in different states?

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee? (Past or Present)	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
One test and standard for all students	73%	74%	68%	73%	74%	63%
Different tests and standards in different states	27	26	32	27	26	37

Student Accountability

3. In some states, students in certain grades must pass an exam before they are eligible to move on to the next grade. Do you support or oppose this requirement?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely support	52%	54%	49%	43%	52%	53%
Somewhat support	29	28	33	36	30	26
Neither support nor oppose	9	9	5	9	9	7
Somewhat oppose	6	6	8	5	6	9
Completely oppose	3	3	5	6	3	6

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up alternative routes into higher education. Only 45 percent of respondents support allowing students who pass an exam at the 10th-grade level to transfer immediately to a community college, as recently proposed by the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce. Rather, 55 percent of all respondents, and roughly the same share of each subgroup, support requiring students to complete four years of high school (Q. 5).

School Accountability under NCLB

High-stakes student accountability is more popular than the simple practice of publishing the average test performance of each school's students. Only 60 percent of those surveyed support the latter policy, which is less stringent than the NCLB requirement that states publish the percentage of students in each school, and of various subgroups within it, that are proficient in math and reading. Just 20 percent of the public oppose publishing average test scores at the school level, with another 20 percent expressing neither support nor opposition (Q. 6).

NCLB also requires that schools be reconstituted if they fail to meet state-mandated performance benchmarks for five years in a row. Currently, states and districts are granted a great deal of flexibility in deciding how to reconstitute schools. Options range from minimal reorganization to replacing teachers and administrators to conversion into charter schools. When asked about these options, Americans express greater support for replacing teachers and principals than for converting failed district schools into charter schools. Roughly two-thirds of the adult population support replacing teachers and/or principals at persistently failing schools, and only one in ten opposes such options. Just 29 percent support converting the schools into charter schools.

Student Accountability continued

4. In some states, students must pass an exam before they are eligible to receive a high school diploma. Do you support or oppose this requirement?

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee?	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely support	60%	61%	53%	53%	61%	53%
Somewhat support	25	23	30	29	24	26
Neither support nor oppose	6	7	4	4	6	6
Somewhat oppose	6	5	6	7	5	9
Completely oppose	4	3	8	6	4	7

5. Do you think students who pass an examination at the tenth-grade level should be given the opportunity to transfer immediately to a community college, or do you think all students should be required to complete four years of high school before going on to further education?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Give opportunity to transfer to community college	45%	45%	42%	43%	46%	44%
Require four years of high school	55	55	58	57	54	56

School Accountability under NCLB

6. Do you support or oppose making available to the general public the average test scores of students at each public school?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely support	38%	39%	33%	40%	38%	40%
Somewhat support	22	22	18	20	21	23
Neither support nor oppose	20	20	24	21	21	16
Somewhat oppose	9	9	12	9	9	8
Completely oppose	11	10	13	10	10	12

7. Suppose a public school does not meet state-determined standards for five years in a row. Do you support or oppose the following measures?

7.1 replacing teachers

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely support	33%	34%	27%	36%	34%	32%
Somewhat support	34	33	44	28	34	32
Neither support nor oppose	22	23	18	25	24	14
Somewhat oppose	6	7	5	6	6	12
Completely oppose	4	3	6	6	3	9

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Still, that doesn't signal widespread opposition to charter schools, a topic we return to below. Only 25 percent of the population actually opposed charter-school conversion, while fully 46 percent take no position one way or the other (Q. 7).

School Choice

Many accountability initiatives have long enjoyed the support of policymakers and the general public. More controversial in state and national policy discussions have been proposals to enable parents, especially low-income parents, to exercise greater choice over their children's education through school vouchers, tax credits, charter schools, or home schooling. Despite that controversy, a plurality of the general public supports choice initiatives. African Americans and Hispanics express more support for school choice than do white Americans. Opponents of most forms of choice, meanwhile, constitute a fairly small segment of the American public, though many adults have yet to be persuaded one way or the other.

Vouchers

Few education reforms inspire as much debate as do proposals to provide low-income families with vouchers that would allow them to send their children to private schools. Apart from programs serving disabled students, only Wisconsin, Ohio, and Washington, D.C., have publicly funded voucher programs in operation. Elsewhere, state legislatures, referenda, and/or state courts have defeated proposed voucher initiatives.

Opponents of most forms of school choice constitute a fairly small segment of the American public.

Despite the legislative and legal disputes, a plurality of the public supports the voucher idea (see Figure 3). Forty-five percent of those surveyed favor offering vouchers to low-income families, 34 percent oppose the idea, and 20 percent neither favor nor oppose it. Both African Americans and Hispanics are markedly more likely to support vouchers than are whites. Indeed, 68 percent of African Americans and

School Accountability under NCLB continued

7.2 replacing the principal

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee?	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely support	38%	37%	39%	40%	38%	40%
Somewhat support	30	32	28	23	30	29
Neither support nor oppose	23	23	19	28	25	14
Somewhat oppose	6	5	7	5	5	11
Completely oppose	3	2	6	5	3	5

7.3 turning the school into a charter school

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely support	12%	12%	14%	12%	11%	19%
Somewhat support	17	17	20	14	17	20
Neither support nor oppose	46	46	38	51	48	28
Somewhat oppose	11	11	12	10	10	15
Completely oppose	14	13	16	13	13	19

Vouchers

8. A proposal has been made that would use government funds to pay the tuition of low-income students who choose to attend private schools. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely favor	21%	14%	41%	35%	21%	18%
Somewhat favor	24	24	27	26	25	22
Neither favor nor oppose	20	22	17	17	21	18
Somewhat oppose	15	17	8	12	15	17
Completely oppose	19	23	7	11	19	25

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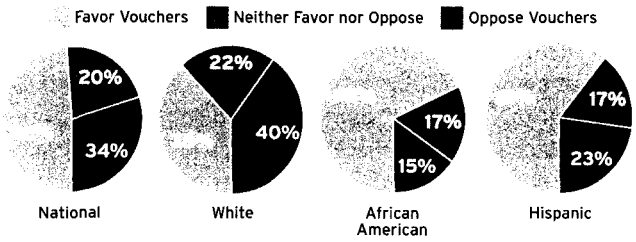
School Vouchers (Figure 3)
Support for school vouchers is strongest among African Americans and Hispanics. Yet only a little more than one-third of all Americans oppose one of the most controversial reform proposals.



61 percent of Hispanics favor vouchers, compared to 38 percent of whites. Only 15 percent of African Americans and 23 percent of Hispanics oppose vouchers, compared to 40 percent of whites (Q. 8).

When asked about the design of a school voucher program, 85 percent of Americans support allowing parents using vouchers to choose both religious and nonreligious private schools, a practice the U.S. Supreme Court upheld in 2002. Though African Americans appear slightly more likely to support the option of sending a child to a religious school, subgroup differences on this matter are small (Q. 9).

Tax Credits

Tax credit programs that help defray the cost of a private education are a less publicized, but more widely available, form of school choice than vouchers. Such programs exist in one form or another in several states, including Pennsylvania, Arizona, Minnesota, Illinois, and Florida. The greater incidence of tax credit programs could be due to the broader public support for this approach than for vouchers. Nationwide, 53 percent of adults favor tax credits, while only 25 percent oppose them, with another 23 percent neither favoring nor opposing the idea. As with vouchers, African Americans and Hispanics express the highest levels of support for tax credits (Q. 10).

Charter Schools

Compared to school vouchers and tuition tax credits, state legislatures have generally found charter schools to be more politically palatable. Charter schools are public schools of

Vouchers continued

9. Some people say low-income students participating in these programs should be allowed to attend either religious or non-religious private schools. Other people say low-income students participating in these programs should be allowed to attend only non-religious private schools. Which comes closer to your view?

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee?	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Choose both religious and non-religious schools	85%	84%	91%	82%	85%	81%
Choose only non-religious schools	15	16	9	18	15	19

10. A proposal has been made to offer a tax credit to low-income parents who send their child to a private school. Would you favor or oppose such a proposal?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely favor	27%	22%	42%	37%	27%	25%
Somewhat favor	26	26	25	23	26	25
Neither favor nor oppose	23	22	21	24	23	22
Somewhat oppose	10	12	6	7	10	13
Completely oppose	15	17	6	8	15	15

Charter Schools

11. Many states allow for the formation of charter schools, which are privately managed under a renewable performance contract that exempts them from many of the regulations of other public schools. Do you support or oppose the formation of charter schools?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely support	19%	18%	25%	19%	19%	22%
Somewhat support	25	24	22	29	25	25
Neither support nor oppose	42	44	41	35	43	33
Somewhat oppose	8	8	5	10	8	8
Completely oppose	6	6	7	7	5	13

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choice that are privately managed under a renewable performance contract that exempts them from many of the regulations that apply to other public schools. The first of these schools opened its doors in Minnesota in 1992, and their numbers have grown steadily since. In the 2006–07 school year, roughly 4,000 charter schools served 1.15 million students across 40 states and Washington, D.C.

For the most part, Americans either express support for charter schools or opt not to take a position one way or the other (see Figure 4). Forty-four percent of respondents support their formation, and another 42 percent neither support nor oppose them. Only 14 percent of Americans oppose charter schools. Differences across subgroups are reasonably small, with slightly higher proportions of African Americans supporting charter schools and school employees opposing them (Q. 11).

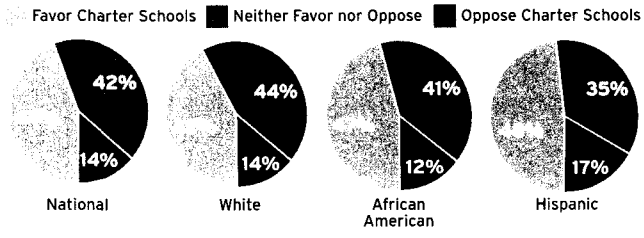
Three-quarters of Americans also believe that charter schools should be given at least the same amount of funding per child as district-operated public schools, in contrast to the widespread state practice of awarding charter schools less funding. Even 68 percent of present or past school employees endorse funding charter schools at levels equivalent to (or better than) those of traditional public schools (Q. 12).

Though Americans appear cautiously supportive of charter schools, most are confused about them. For example, when asked whether charter schools are free to teach religion (they are not), or whether they can charge tuition (they cannot), almost two-thirds of the public confesses to not knowing the answer and another quarter offers the wrong answer. Indeed, only 13 percent of adults nationwide correctly note that charter schools cannot teach religion and 16 percent correctly observe that charter schools may not charge tuition (Q. 13).

Support for charter schools appears especially high among those adults who reveal higher levels of knowledge about them.

Importantly, support for charter schools appears especially high among those adults who reveal higher levels of knowledge about them. Fully 66 percent of those adults who correctly answer both of the knowledge-based questions

Charter Schools (Figure 4)
Few Americans have strong opinions about charter schools. Only a small minority of Americans oppose them, but nearly half take no stance at all.



Charter Schools continued

12. Do you think charter schools should be given more, less, or the same amount of government funding for each child as other public schools?

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee?	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
More	7%	4%	14%	9%	7%	9%
Less	25	27	16	22	24	32
Same	68	68	70	69	70	59

13. Based on what you have heard about charter schools, are the following statements true or false?

13.1 Charter schools are free to teach religion

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
True	24%	24%	22%	25%	24%	28%
False	13	13	9	15	12	19
Don't know	63	63	69	60	64	54

13.2 Charter schools may not charge tuition

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
True	16%	15%	18%	16%	14%	27%
False	24	22	21	28	23	28
Don't know	60	62	61	56	63	45

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support charter schools, as compared to 38 percent of those who answer both incorrectly. Similarly, 81 and 68 percent of the two respective groups claim that funding for students in charter and other public schools should be equalized. Opposition to charter schools, to the extent that it exists, appears to be highest among those who know less about them.

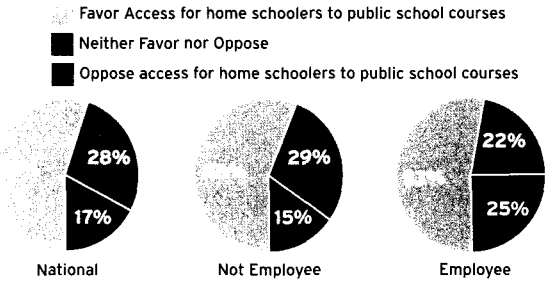
School Choice under NCLB

Under NCLB, if a school has failed to meet the law's accountability provisions two years in a row, parents have the option of sending their child to a higher-performing public school within the same district. But only about 1 percent of those eligible to move to a different school under NCLB have taken advantage of this option. As a result, choice advocates have proposed revisions in the legislation that would expand the range of options available to parents.

A clear plurality of the public at large supports revisions in NCLB to increase the number of choice options available to parents whose children attend low-performing schools. Sixty percent support allowing them to select a school in another district, a step that would vastly expand the range of options, yet has not received serious consideration in Congress. Only 14 percent oppose it. Meanwhile, 47 percent support giving parents the option of sending their child to a private school, and only 23 percent oppose it (Q. 14).

Americans reveal low levels of support for the option of sending children to a failing school within the same district. Only 25 percent express support, probably because the public sees scant benefit from moving a child from one failing school to another.

Home Schooling (Figure 5)
Giving home schoolers access to selected public-school courses is opposed by only a small minority of those surveyed. Most current and former public school employees also tend to support the idea.



School Choice under NCLB

14. Students attending a public school that fails to meet state-determined standards for two years in a row currently have the option of using government funds to attend another public school in their district, provided that school meets state-determined standards for student learning. Do you support or oppose also allowing these students to attend any of the following schools?

14.1 public schools in another district

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee?	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely support	31%	30%	32%	33%	31%	35%
Somewhat support	29	28	35	30	29	26
Neither support nor oppose	26	27	20	23	27	16
Somewhat oppose	8	8	7	10	7	13
Completely oppose	6	7	5	5	6	10

14.2 a private school

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely support	22%	22%	23%	24%	22%	25%
Somewhat support	25	24	29	30	25	26
Neither support nor oppose	29	29	31	30	31	20
Somewhat oppose	10	11	9	7	10	11
Completely oppose	13	15	8	9	13	18

14.3 public schools in their district that failed to meet state standards

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely support	11%	11%	14%	11%	11%	17%
Somewhat support	14	13	20	14	14	16
Neither support nor oppose	30	31	24	32	32	22
Somewhat oppose	19	18	19	23	19	20
Completely oppose	25	27	24	20	25	25

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Home Schooling

The number of American families opting to teach their children at home has increased dramatically in recent years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, about 1.1 million students were being home schooled in the United States in 2003, the most recent year for which official data are available, up from roughly 850,000 students in 1999.

Forty percent of the public say they know a family that currently home schools its children. And most Americans support allowing home-schooled children to take advantage of public school resources (see Figure 5), including attendance in selected classes and participation in sports and other extracurricular activities. Americans who know a home-schooling family are especially likely to support a more expansive array of schooling options for them. Fully 68 percent of adults who themselves know a home-schooled child believe that such children should have the option of taking selected classes at local public schools, and another 61 percent support allowing them to participate in sports and extracurricular programs, as compared with 48 percent and 51 percent, respectively, of adults who do not know a home-schooled child (Q.15, 16, 17).

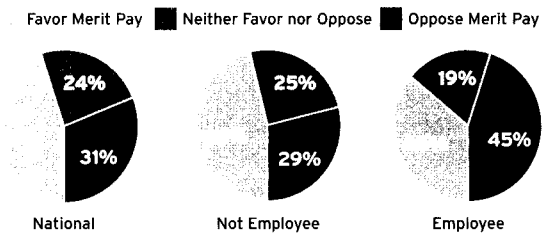
Teacher Pay and Licensure

Just as lively (and divisive) as the controversy over school choice and home schooling has been the debate over teacher pay and licensure. On these issues, pluralities of the public support some, but not all, reform proposals.

Differential Pay

Although most scholars agree that teachers represent the single most important school contributor to a student's academic progress, consensus breaks down as soon as the question turns to how best to design compensation systems to enhance teacher quality. On one side, the National Education Association defends the current practice of paying all teachers the same amount, except for differences based on past experience and graduate coursework. On the other side, groups such as the Teaching Commission, and the Progressive Policy Institute have proposed that we

Merit Pay (Figure 6)
Americans are more likely to favor than oppose merit pay for teachers whose students are making academic progress. However, current or former school employees are more likely to oppose than to support the idea.



Home Schooling

15. Rather than send them to a school, some parents prefer to educate their children at home. Do you favor or oppose allowing home-schooled children to attend selected classes at local public schools?

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee?	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely favor	30%	31%	17%	24%	30%	31%
Somewhat favor	25	24	25	30	26	22
Neither favor nor oppose	28	28	36	27	29	22
Somewhat oppose	9	9	13	12	9	9
Completely oppose	8	8	10	6	6	16

16. Do you favor or oppose allowing home-schooled children to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities at local public schools?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely favor	34%	32%	24%	37%	34%	33%
Somewhat favor	22	22	22	24	23	18
Neither favor nor oppose	26	27	30	25	26	24
Somewhat oppose	8	8	12	7	8	12
Completely oppose	10	11	12	7	10	14

17. Do you know any family that currently home schools their child?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Yes	40%	46%	24%	24%	38%	56%
No	60	54	76	76	62	44

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pay teachers according to how much students are learning in their classrooms (often as measured by test results), the difficulty of the teachers' classroom environment or how hard it is to recruit quality teachers knowledgeable in a particular subject.

State Licensure

To be fully certified, public school teachers in nearly every state must complete a requisite number of courses in education and the subject matter appropriate to their chosen area of instruction. In recent years, however, some states have modified this practice by allowing principals to hire college-educated individuals who have not completed the coursework ordinarily required for certification. The innovation remains controversial, as many education schools and teacher organizations believe that a teacher is only qualified after completing appropriate pedagogical training.

Forty-eight percent say that principals should be allowed to hire college graduates who lack formal teaching credentials, while 33 percent oppose the idea.

Though willing to entertain some reforms, the public is in no rush to abandon the traditional compensation system. Forty-five percent agree that a teacher's salary should depend in part upon students' academic progress while 31 percent disagree, and the remaining 24 percent choose not to express an opinion (see Figure 6). (Opinions about merit pay do not differ notably if Americans are asked about basing a teacher's pay on "students' academic progress" or on "students' academic progress on state tests.") A bare majority of Americans support increasing the salaries of those teaching in challenging school environments instead of using the same funds to offer all teachers a smaller pay increase. By a two-to-one margin, however, respondents would prefer to see new funds for teacher pay distributed equally across all teachers rather than targeted toward those in high-demand subject areas, such as math and science (Q.18, 19, 20).

A plurality of the public, however, supports a more permissive teacher-recruitment policy. Forty-eight percent of those surveyed say that principals should be allowed to hire college graduates who lack formal teaching credentials, while only 33 percent oppose the idea, and 20 percent express no opinion. A larger share, 41 percent, of current and former school employees oppose the idea (Q. 21).

School Spending

The average amount of money spent per pupil by U.S. public schools has more than doubled in real terms since 1970,

Differential Pay

18. Do you favor or oppose basing a teacher's salary, in part, on students' academic progress [on state tests]?

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee?	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely favor	14%	14%	11%	16%	14%	13%
Somewhat favor	31	33	22	29	32	23
Neither favor nor oppose	24	22	32	24	25	19
Somewhat oppose	16	16	19	14	16	17
Completely oppose	15	15	16	16	13	28

19. Do you think it is more important to give a larger salary increase to teachers who work in challenging schools, such as schools in central cities? Or is it better to give a smaller salary increase to all teachers?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Larger increase to teachers in challenging schools	53%	52%	61%	45%	52%	56%
Smaller salary increase to all teachers	47	48	39	55	48	44

20. Some states are considering increasing teacher salaries. Do you think it is more important to give a larger salary increase to teachers in subject areas where there are shortages, such as math and science? Or is it better to give a smaller salary increase to all teachers?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Larger salary increase to teachers in math and science	33%	32%	38%	33%	33%	31%
Smaller salary increase to all teachers	67	68	62	67	67	69

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and the number of pupils per employed teacher has declined from 22 to 15. Teacher salaries have only barely kept pace with average wages nationwide, and the gap between teacher salaries and those of other college-educated workers has actually widened. Given these facts, some policy analysts claim that current spending levels are more than adequate and that further cuts in class size are unnecessary, while others say much more needs to be done, especially on the teacher salary front.

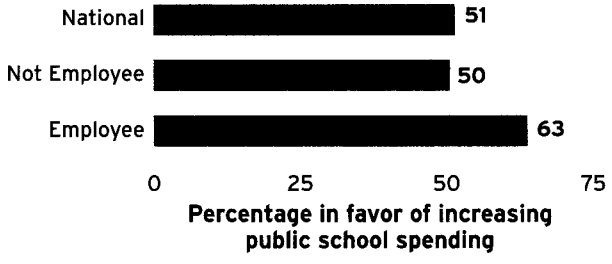
The public is closely divided on this issue (see Figure 7). Specifically, 51 percent say that spending on public education should increase, while 38 percent think it should remain the same and 10 percent favor spending cuts. Support for additional spending is highest among African Americans, Hispanics, and current and former public school employees, with more than 60 percent of each of those groups calling for increases in public school budgets (Q. 22).

Most Americans also express confidence that spending more on public education in their local school district would result in increased student learning. Fifty-nine percent of the public is at least somewhat confident that spending would increase student learning, as are 80 percent of African Americans, 70 percent of Hispanics, and 64 percent of school employees (Q. 23).

Given the stagnation of teacher salaries in the last three decades and the concomitant decline in class sizes, it is somewhat surprising that the public continues to prefer further cuts in class size over increases in teacher salaries. When asked whether education dollars are better spent increasing teacher salaries or decreasing class size, fully 77 percent prefer the latter option. Though scholars continue to debate the benefits of class-size reductions, the general public would appear convinced (Q. 24).

Most Americans express confidence that spending more on public education in their local school district would result in increased student learning.

School Spending (Figure 7)
A bare majority of Americans—but nearly two-thirds of those who work (or once worked) for the schools—believe spending on public education should increase.



State Licensure

21. Do you favor or oppose allowing principals to hire college graduates who they believe will be effective in the classroom even if they do not have formal teaching credentials?

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee?	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Completely favor	16%	15%	17%	15%	15%	18%
Somewhat favor	32	31	29	39	32	30
Neither favor nor oppose	20	20	19	16	21	11
Somewhat oppose	18	18	16	19	18	17
Completely oppose	15	16	19	12	13	24

School Spending

22. Keeping in mind that the money for public education has to be paid by taxes, do you think that government funding for public schools in your district should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Greatly increase	13%	12%	22%	16%	12%	22%
Increase	38	35	43	44	38	41
Stay about the same	38	42	28	34	39	29
Decrease	8	9	3	5	8	5
Greatly decrease	2	3	4	1	2	3

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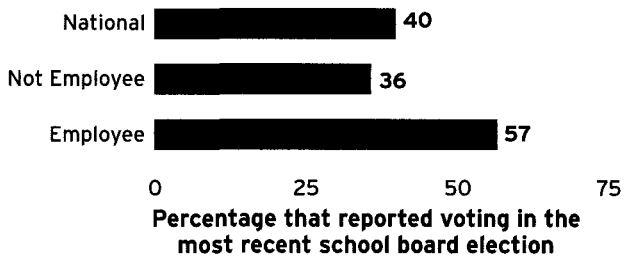
Voting in School Board Elections

The expanding reach of federal and state policies notwithstanding, responsibility for the day-to-day management of the nation's 14,000-plus school districts still lies primarily with locally elected school boards. Yet turnout for school board elections, which are often held at dates different from those of general elections, is notoriously low, often lingering in the single digits. Such dismal figures may make it possible for a motivated group, such as the local teachers union or advocates of a particular curricular innovation, to disproportionately influence election outcomes. One wonders, then, whether the relatively small number of voters who show up on election day share the general views of other district residents.

When using poll data to examine turnout, it is important to keep in mind that Americans consistently overstate their propensity to vote in U.S. elections. As a result, the precise proportion of Americans who claim to vote in school board elections—40 percent, in our survey—is less informative than differences in reported turnout across the various subgroups. Whites and African Americans appear slightly more likely than Hispanics to have voted in their last school board election (Q. 25). Important differences, meanwhile, are observed among public school employees and the rest of the population. Indeed, current and former public school employees are 21 percentage points more likely to claim that they voted in their last school board election than is everyone else (see Figure 8).

Who Votes? (Figure 8)
Fully 57 percent of current and former public school employees claim to have voted in the last school board elections, compared to just 36 percent of the general public.



Support for school choice in all its forms and for NCLB appears to be somewhat weaker among voters in school board elections than among the population as a whole. Compared to the rest of the population, those who claim to have voted in the last election are 8 percentage points more likely to oppose school vouchers, 7 percentage points more likely to oppose charter schools, and 9 percentage points more likely

Current and former public school employees are 21 percentage points more likely to claim that they voted in their last school board election than is everyone else.

School Spending continued

23. If more money were spent on public schools in your district, how confident are you that students would learn more?

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee?	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Very confident	16%	13%	34%	18%	16%	20%
Somewhat confident	43	40	46	52	43	44
Not very confident	29	33	17	22	30	25
Not confident at all	12	14	4	8	12	12

24. Which do you think is a better use of our educational dollars, increasing teacher salaries or decreasing class size?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Increasing teacher salaries	23%	21%	25%	27%	23%	19%
Decreasing class size	77	79	75	73	77	81

Voting in School Board Elections

25. Many school board elections are held at a time different from other elections. As a result, many people are unable to vote in them. Do you remember for sure whether you voted in the last school board election?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
Voted	40%	40%	42%	34%	36%	57%
Did not vote	36	36	35	34	38	25
Ineligible	4	4	2	9	4	3
Don't know, can't remember	21	20	21	23	22	15

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to oppose tax credits. Voters are also 10 percentage points more likely to oppose the renewal of NCLB when the law is mentioned by name, than is the rest of the population; but when the law is described but not named, nonvoters are actually 2 percentage points more likely to oppose its renewal.

For the most part, how Americans evaluate the public schools in their own communities does not strongly correlate with their support for the reform proposals included in this survey. One exception, though, bears mentioning. Though respondents who give their schools a C, D, or F are just as likely as respondents who give their schools an A or B to support increases in school spending, the former group is twice as likely to express no confidence that more spending will improve student learning.

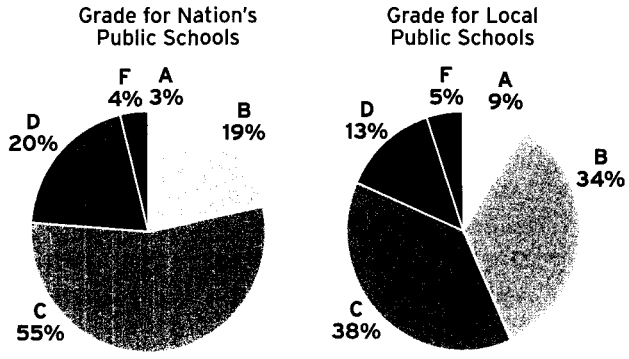
Just 22 percent of Americans give public schools in general an A or B, 55 percent a C, and 24 percent a D or F.

Overall Assessment

When asked to grade the public schools, respondents in this survey offer assessments that look much like those observed in other national surveys of education attitudes (see Figure 9). Forty-three percent give the schools in their own community an A or a B, 38 percent assign a C, and 18 percent give a D or F. When asked about public schools around the nation, these grades drop. Just 22 percent of Americans give public schools in general an A or B, 55 percent a C, and 24 percent a D or F.

Among the various subgroups, some interesting differences emerge. When asked about the schools around the nation, whites, Hispanics, and African Americans offer similar assessments, as do public school employees and the remaining population. When asked about the schools in their own district, however, African Americans and Hispanics give notably lower marks than whites. Fully 48 percent of whites award the schools in their community an A or B grade, as compared to 40 percent of Hispanics and 27 percent of African Americans. The responses of public school employees and everyone else do not differ significantly (Q. 26, 27).

Grading American Schools (Figure 9)
Only 22 percent of those surveyed gave American schools an A or a B, but 43 percent gave one of those grades to the schools in their own community.



Overall Assessment

26. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here?

		Racial/Ethnic Identity			Public School Employee?	
	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
A	9%	10%	7%	8%	9%	12%
B	34	38	20	32	34	34
C	38	36	48	41	39	37
D	13	13	18	11	13	11
Fail	5	4	7	9	5	7

27. How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally?

	National	White	African American	Hispanic	Not Employee	Employee
A	3%	1%	7%	8%	2%	5%
B	19	18	20	17	19	16
C	55	56	52	58	55	54
D	20	22	14	14	20	19
Fail	4	3	6	2	4	6

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This survey reveals a U.S. public that wants its schools to become more effective and is willing to endorse a wide variety of reforms.

Conclusions

This survey reveals a U.S. public that continues to support its public schools, but also one that wants these schools to become more effective and is willing to endorse a wide variety of reforms it thinks will bring that about. Americans, for the most part, are pragmatists. They are searching for something that works. It could be accountability, it might be choice, it could be class-size reduction, and it may be changes in teacher recruitment and pay. Reform proposals in each of these areas have pluralities in support of them. In some instances, though, sizable portions of the public remain unpersuaded by advocates on either side.

Clearly, the debate over American education is far from over.

William G. Howell is associate professor in the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago. Martin R. West is assistant professor of education at Brown University and an executive editor of Education Next. *Paul E. Peterson is professor of government at Harvard University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. He serves as editor-in-chief of* Education Next.

Survey Methods

This survey, sponsored by Education Next and the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University, was conducted by the polling firm Knowledge Networks (KN) between February 16 and March 15, 2007. KN maintains a nationally representative panel of adults, obtained via list-assisted random digit dialing sampling techniques, who agree to participate in a limited number of online surveys. Because KN offers members of its panel free Internet access and a WebTV device that connects to a telephone and television, the sample is not limited to current computer owners or users with Internet access. When recruiting for the panel, KN sends out an advance mailing and follows up with at least 15 dial attempts. The panel, then, is updated quarterly. Detailed information about the maintenance of the KN panel, the protocols used to administer surveys, and the comparability of online and telephone surveys is available online (www.knowledgenetworks.com/quality/).

The main findings from the Education Next–PEPG survey reported in this essay are based on a nationally representative stratified sample of 2,000 adults (age 18 years and older). The sample consists of 1,482 non-Hispanic whites, 233 non-Hispanic blacks, and 171 Hispanics. Within the sample, 309 individuals either currently work or previously worked for the public schools, and 1,691 individuals have had no employment in public schools. We oversampled parents of school-age children, who constitute 811 of the total sample. Because differences in the responses of parents and nonparents are negligible, we do not present the findings for these two subgroups. We use poststratification population weights to adjust for survey nonresponse as well as for the oversampling of parents. These weights ensure that the observed demographic characteristics of the final sample match the known characteristics of the national adult population.

In general, survey responses based on larger numbers of observations are more precise, that is, less prone to sampling variance, than those made across groups with fewer numbers of observations. As a consequence, answers attributed to the national population are more precisely estimated than are those attributed to subgroups. With 2,000 respondents, the margin of error for responses given by the full sample in the Education Next–PEPG survey is roughly 2 percentage points.

On two items, questions 1 and 18, we conducted experiments to examine the effect of variations in the way questions are posed. On question 1, the wording did appear to influence responses, so we present the results of both versions. Answers did not differ materially on question 18, so we report the average results across the two versions of that question. Additionally, to investigate the effects of question ordering, half the sample answered questions 26 and 27 at the beginning of the survey, and half did so at the end. We did not find any evidence of question order effects; hence, we present only the pooled responses in this report.

Percentages do not always add precisely to 100 as a result of rounding to the nearest percentage point.

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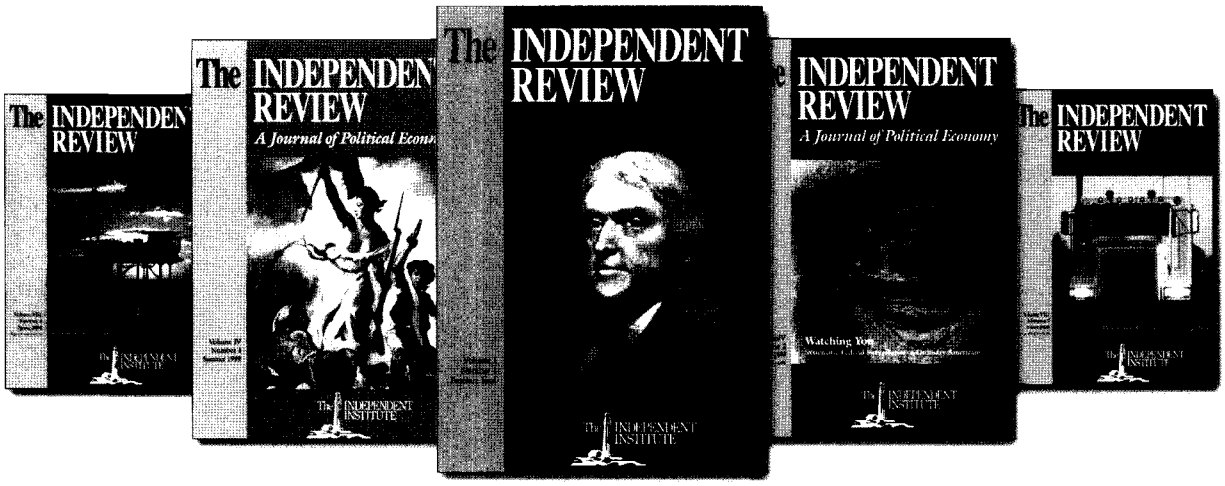

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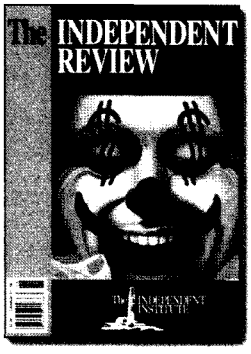

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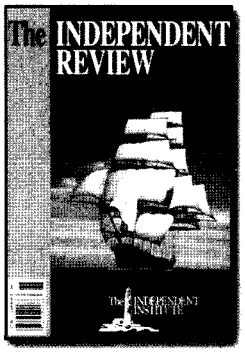

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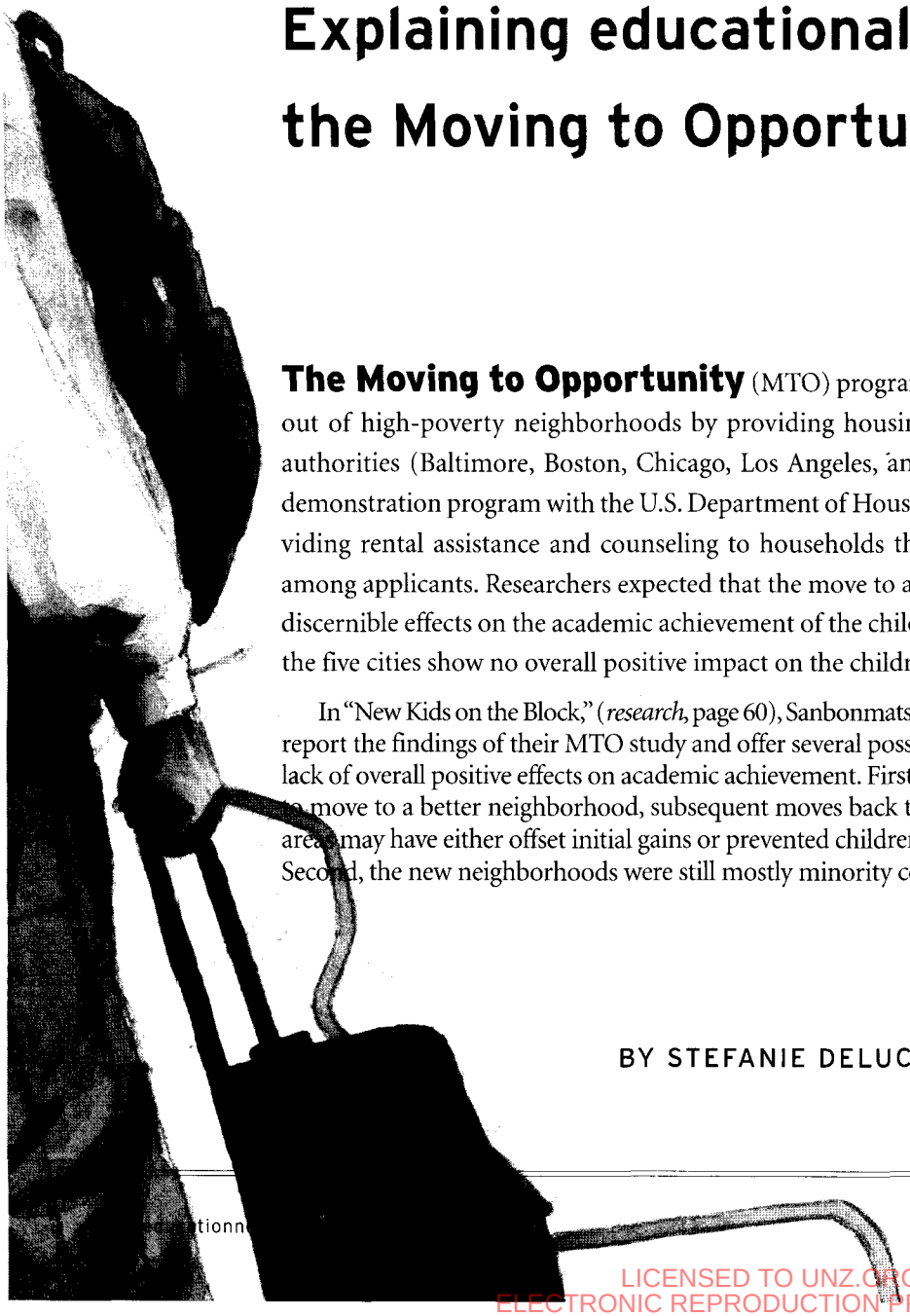
ALL OVER THE MAP

Explaining educational outcomes of the Moving to Opportunity program



The Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program sought to relocate poor families out of high-poverty neighborhoods by providing housing vouchers. Five urban housing authorities (Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York) participated in the demonstration program with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, providing rental assistance and counseling to households that were randomly selected from among applicants. Researchers expected that the move to a better neighborhood would have discernible effects on the academic achievement of the children involved, yet MTO data from the five cities show no overall positive impact on the children's learning. Why?

In "New Kids on the Block," (*research*, page 60), Sanbonmatsu, Kling, Duncan, and Brooks-Gunn report the findings of their MTO study and offer several possible explanations for the program's lack of overall positive effects on academic achievement. First, for families that did use a voucher to move to a better neighborhood, subsequent moves back to highly segregated, disadvantaged areas may have either offset initial gains or prevented children from experiencing better schools. Second, the new neighborhoods were still mostly minority communities and may not have had

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schools or other public services of substantially higher quality than those they left behind. Though more affluent, the new neighborhoods may not have been affluent enough to make a difference in the education services the students received. Third, many control group children may already have been attending a school other than one in their neighborhood as a result of expanded school choice policies, which also meant that children in the experimental group could stay in their original schools after their families moved. The researchers also mention the extreme disadvantage that characterized the lives of many of the MTO families as a possible explanation for the differences between what researchers expected (improvements in achievement resulting from moving to better areas) and the actual results.

The Moving to Opportunity Demonstration

The MTO program began in 1994 in five cities and over the next four years, a total of 4,248 families participated: 1,729 families were offered restricted MTO vouchers (for the first year, families could move only to neighborhoods that had a poverty rate of less than 10 percent in 1990), 1,209 families were offered Section 8 vouchers (an existing HUD housing program), and 1,310 families entered the lottery but were offered neither voucher. This latter group became the control group for the experiment. About half of the families offered a voucher used it to relocate.

In Baltimore, 636 families participated in the MTO program, with 252 families offered restricted MTO vouchers, 187 families offered Section 8 housing vouchers, and 197 families placed in the control group (entered the lottery but were offered neither voucher). Just over half (146 or 58 percent) of the families offered a restricted voucher used it to move, and nearly three-quarters (135 or 72 percent) of the families who were offered a Section 8 voucher took advantage of the offer and relocated.

It is important to recognize that the MTO program did enable many families to improve their lives and those of their children. Barbara, a 41-year-old mother of five, left Baltimore city for the county, where she was pleased that the schools had so much more to offer: "stepping class, drama class, singing, girls' basketball, volleyball…when the kid is not occupied, they gonna be out there doing whatever." She felt that if she didn't get her daughter out of the city school system, "she wasn't gonna make it and I didn't want her to get caught up in all the negativity that kids can do cause there's a lot of that up there." Parents commonly expressed the sentiment that their children would not "survive" in the city schools, and this fear drove many of the experimental movers to participate in the program.

In this essay, I use interview data collected from the Baltimore site of the MTO program to consider possible reasons MTO did not have the expected results for educational achievement. Baltimore is the only one of the five cities in which Sanbonmatsu and her colleagues found positive impacts on reading and math test scores. But these improvements were only for elementary school–aged children from families that used restricted MTO vouchers (see sidebar above). These effects on achievement, while statistically significant, were nonetheless small. The same dynamics that diminished education benefits in Baltimore were likely at play in the other MTO cities as well.

The View from Baltimore

My colleagues and I conducted interviews in Baltimore between July 2003 and June 2004. Heads of household participated in an in-depth interview that lasted between three and five hours, and participants chose pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Children's names and school names have also been changed. Based on these interviews, I try to answer two questions: First, why is it that parents don't switch children's schools, either in conjunction with a residential move or in light of increasing schooling options in Baltimore city? Second, when school changes do occur, why don't they lead to enhancements in children's academic and developmental progress?

There are five status groups of participants in the MTO experiment: control group families, experimental movers (who received restricted vouchers), experimental non-movers (who were offered but did not accept restricted vouchers), Section 8 movers, and Section 8 non-movers. I only compare the first two groups in this paper, since we expected school quality changes to be greatest between these two. For the discussion below, I analyzed 90 interviews with mothers and primary caregivers: 55 were from the control group and 35 were experimental movers, representing about one-quarter of the families in each group.

Moving Out

Families who signed up for the chance to get a voucher through MTO lived in some of the poorest and most segregated neighborhoods in Baltimore. Most tracts had 80 percent or more African American residents, and more than 40 percent of the residents had incomes at or below the poverty threshold. As is common for large urban school districts, the student body of Baltimore city's schools is predominantly minority and poor. Baltimore city's schools are far more racially segregated and poorer than the schools in the four adjacent counties.

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When they signed up for the program, many of the families were living in one of five public housing projects that were soon to be demolished. Thus, many control group families were forced to move, for better or worse. Control group families did not receive a voucher or any assistance from the MTO program, but could have acquired HUD vouchers through other means.

There were large differences in the moves made by MTO experimental movers and control group families. Almost all of the control group families who moved from their original neighborhoods relocated to highly segregated, poor areas, a finding consistent with much of the research on mobility among low-income minority families. Most of the families who used MTO vouchers left areas of concentrated poverty for safer, significantly less impoverished neighborhoods. While many of the new neighborhoods were still in Baltimore city, there were a number of moves into the outlying counties. But the moves, with few exceptions, did not result in families relocating to areas with much lower concentrations of African Americans (see Figure 1).

How closely tied were residence and school attendance prior to participation in MTO? Figure 2 displays the original neighborhoods for the families who used an MTO voucher (experimental movers) and the location of the schools their children attended before moving. A substantial number of the original schools were outside the family's neighborhood school zone. In our interviews, some mothers admitted that they sent their children to nonzone schools in both the city and the county, using addresses belonging to friends or family members. Some did so for school quality reasons and some for logistical reasons, such as proximity to a caregiver. Control families tended to send their children to city schools more often than experimental mover families did. When the MTO program began in 1994, school choice was not much of a factor in Baltimore city, beyond some citywide high schools. But during the late 1990s and into the 2000s, schooling options for families in Baltimore city increased somewhat.

We found two patterns for the schools later attended by experimental mover children. First, there is a relationship between where the family moved after receiving the MTO voucher and the new school a child attended. Second, despite moves to less-impoverished neighborhoods, many experimental mover children still attended schools in the inner city. This is in line with the five-city interim impacts report issued by researchers. By the time the interim survey data were collected, almost 70 percent of children in experimental mover families attended schools in the same district as when they signed up for the program.

Navigating Chaos

While the maps and quantitative data give us an overview of the MTO program, they can also oversimplify how poor families make choices and what their lives are like. Anyone who has tried to do fieldwork with very poor populations understands that often the research itself is subject to the chaos and unpredictability of life in the inner city. In the course of our fieldwork, participants sometimes disappeared. Often, we did interviews at McDonald's because respondents were embarrassed by their housing; other times, interviews were conducted on the floor of the home because there was no furniture. Recording and conducting interviews (to say nothing about the transcription) was complicated by the noise of many different people coming in and out of the area where the interview was taking place. Often children stayed with more than one family member in a week. My colleagues and I sometimes conducted interviews over multiple sessions to accommodate these instabilities.

Frequently, severe substance use and death entered into already-disrupted young lives. I visited an MTO youth in prison, incarcerated for attempted murder after a childhood filled with drug-addicted parents, lead poisoning, and school suspensions. A number of families had experienced the death of a mother: one was a murder in a city park, others were health-related. In the aftermath, aunts and grandmothers took responsibility for raising these children, which sometimes led to problems finding apartments large enough

Often, we did interviews at McDonald's because respondents were embarrassed by their housing; other times, interviews were conducted on the floor of the home because there was no furniture.

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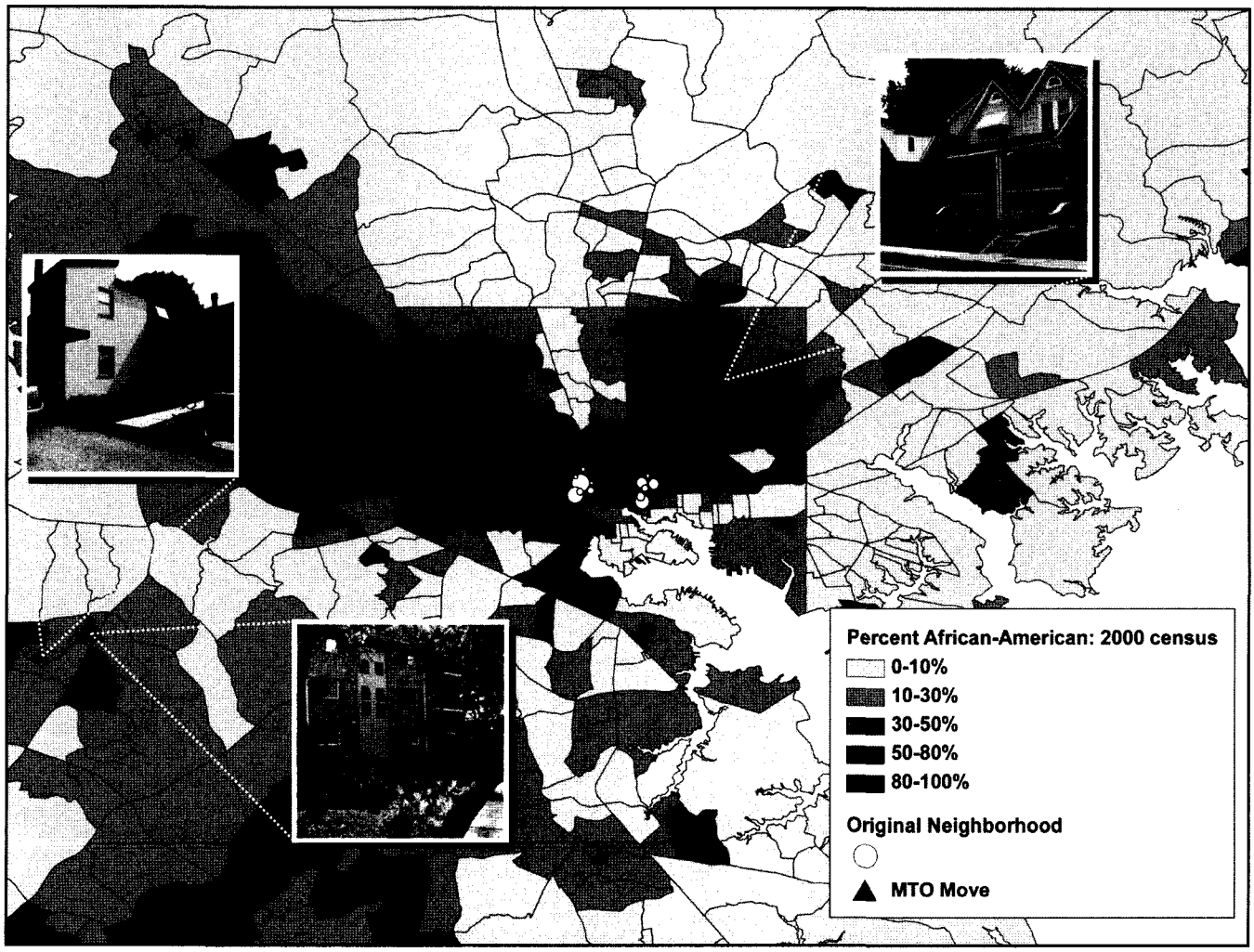
Experimental Mover Families: Percent African American in old and new neighborhoods (Figure 1)



The moves, with few exceptions, did not result in families relocating to areas with much lower concentrations of African Americans.

Note: Photos are representative of new neighborhoods and do not depict actual homes of MTO participants.
SOURCE: Author, from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Moving to Opportunity Interim Survey Data

to accommodate the entire extended family. One aunt took care of her own children plus those of her sister and lived in the homes of two different cousins within a year. This led to multiple high school changes for one of the teenage girls.

Many parents were in and out of jail, work, rehab, and abusive relationships. Some mothers were homeless. Landlords complicated the situation and often made decisions that led to unexpected moves for MTO families. Such "shocks to the system" made residential mobility even more traumatic than it might be for middle-class families and led to even more school instability.

Work schedules are another source of chaos. The job market for the inner-city poor is remarkably unstable. Scheduling and transportation issues are much more salient for the poor than for the middle class. Ironically, one mechanism for coping with mothers' work schedules while ensuring stable schooling is the shuffling of children from one house to another. Many primary caregivers we interviewed were

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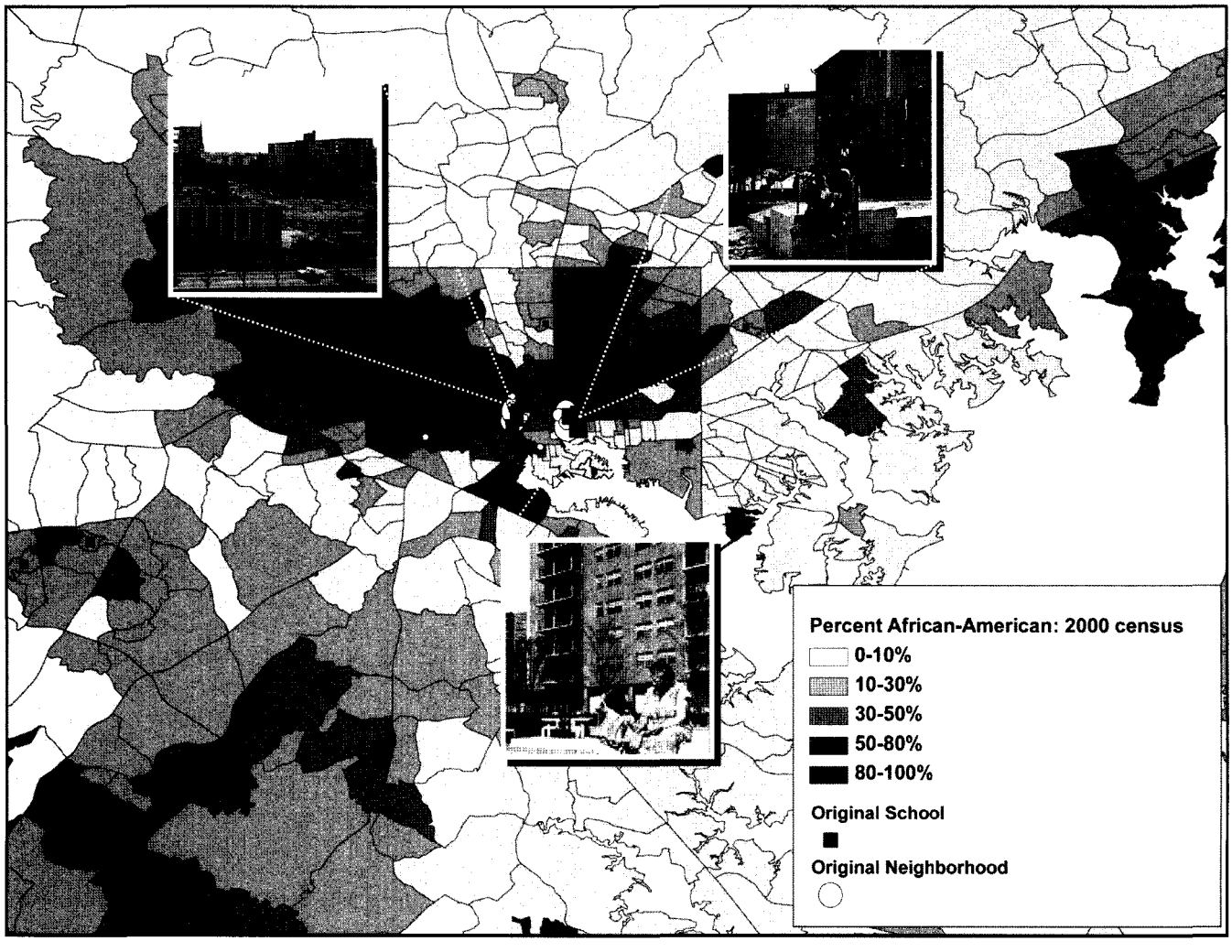
Experimental Mover Families: Original neighborhood and location of children's original school (Figure 2)



NEIGHBORHOOD PHOTOS / AP PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES/ BALTIMORE SUN

A substantial number of the children's original schools were outside the family's neighborhood school zone.

Note: Photos are representative of original neighborhoods and do not depict actual homes of MTO participants.
SOURCE: Author, from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Moving to Opportunity Interim Survey Data

grandmothers whose grandchildren live with them during the school week while their mom works.

The Interviews

The context of decision making among inner-city minority families and the serious challenges of their lives clearly moderate the link between neighborhood moves and educational enhancement. Still, it is a mistake to assume that MTO mattered little to those who participated in the program. A couple of examples illustrate the profound relief and joy that some mothers experienced, and how improvements in neighborhood quality could change lives. The first interview I conducted was with a woman who, with the help of a housing counselor, used her MTO voucher to move herself and her daughter out of the tangle of her substance-abusing family and the threats of public housing and into a peaceful, more integrated, and opportunity-rich area in Northeast Baltimore.

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When she showed me the house, I said, oh, my goodness, it was like fate.... It was an apartment, but the rooms were big. I never had a kitchen that big. I went home, boy, that week I could hardly sleep. I was packing my stuff. I was so happy.... I didn't know at the time when I moved that she was going to [attend] one of the best schools in Baltimore city. I said, oh, my goodness, I didn't know that.

A number of mothers took advantage of MTO vouchers to move out of their old city neighborhoods as part of a plan to stay "clean" and protect their children. Keisha, for example, used her voucher to move to the county, where she has lived for nine years. To avoid the perils of his old zoned city school, she made sure her son attended a local county magnet school. Initially, her son missed his friends from the city, but he really liked the new school and starting making new friends. Keisha and her son had to adjust to the challenge of the magnet school and the higher academic standards. With the aid of teachers, Keisha came to understand why it takes more effort in the county to achieve the good grades her son got in the city.

Several mothers talked about the high levels of fighting, violence, and truancy in their children's schools, but still had children in the same school for years. Sadly, many were satisfied to wait it out or accept teachers they didn't like.

But success stories are only part of the picture. Other transitions to county schools were difficult, even if for the best. As her mother describes, one teenage girl had trouble adjusting to the orderly environment in the county school and was repeatedly suspended.

Plymouth was much better than Langley Court. It wasn't crazy and wild where the students was running all over the place. I actually saw a gym class going on. I see students sitting down. She just could not adapt to that calm atmosphere. She was so used to the unruliness and the craziness. I am like, you are in school to learn; you need to sit back and learn and stop focusing on that nonsense that you were focusing on before at Langley Court. Now it's time to really get down and learn.

Many MTO parents did not switch their children's schools when they moved. Why not? As noted above, some children already attended schools in better areas using the addresses of friends or relatives. Sheila, an experimental mover, had been using her friend's address to send her children to a county school and taking turns with the children's father driving them there. They went to this trouble because they believed that, compared to city schools, the county school was a better place to learn responsibility and what society demands for adult life. Sheila felt especially strongly about this choice, given her long and painful struggle with drugs, which she attributed to the dangers of the city.

Some mothers expressed a desire to maintain social networks and systems of social support and, similarly, to keep children's school connections. Some MTO families saw changing schools as too disruptive.

...they wanted me to move out in Columbia really far out and I was like I wanted something that was accessible to my family, to my church, you know my support system so this is like right in the heart of all of that. And I also wanted something that was affordable, close to the school where my daughter wouldn't have to travel to get to school and like I stated she has been there from pre-K on up to 8th grade.

In other cases, parents became passive and complacent in the face of obdurate school bureaucracies and persistent problems. Some parents left schooling decisions up to the children themselves.

Renee, a mother of two, was the victim of domestic violence in several relationships. She had moved with an MTO voucher from the housing projects in East Baltimore to a safer, more integrated neighborhood in Baltimore county. In a fit of rage, her husband kicked the door in and the landlord then kicked the family out. That jolt landed Renee back in the city, in an apartment in a poor area of West Baltimore, and four more residences in the following two years. Her daughter, a motivated, bright young woman who did homework for hours each night, was referred by a teacher to try a private

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school with financial aid options. Renee left the decision up to her daughter, who preferred to stay in the city public school she was already attending.

MTO families that didn't switch their children's schools often had low expectations for what schools *in general* are able to offer and accomplish.

The only thing that Terry disliked about the school, like I said, there was always riots, they always started fires. They'd let the children go home early, you know, that's the only thing that he disliked about school. But as far as the teachers assisting him as which way is possible, he was fine with it.

Several mothers talked about the high levels of fighting, violence, and truancy in their children's schools, but still had children in the same school for years. Sadly, many were satisfied to wait it out or accept teachers they didn't like. They thought that it would be all right because their child only had "another year or two." Such minimal expectations stretched to their communication and involvement with the school.

I've got a couple letters from the teachers. I have even gotten a couple of calls from the teachers concerning my son in reference to his behavior and his work habits and everything. And by the conversation, I can tell that they were pretty much concerned with his learning. So right there I said, "Okay, this is a pretty good school if I can have a teacher call me and tell me he has some concerns about my child."

Some parents simply wanted to be allowed to visit or be given "some general idea that you know my child is in this school somewhere here."

Low-income parents often lack the basic information necessary for school choice decisions. If parents don't realize that the schools they send their children to are extremely low performing, or that they can exercise choice options and receive financial aid, they are unlikely to take an active stance to change the situation. In a discouraging case, one well-meaning parent mistook a scholarship to one of Baltimore's elite schools for a loan and didn't send her child on to the better school. This mother had previously enrolled her children in Catholic school, but thought that they didn't learn enough "social skills" there, so she sent them back to public school in the county. Another mother misunderstood the school transfer process between Baltimore city and Baltimore county.

Many of the MTO parents took a backseat approach to their children's education. Niecy left the school choice decision entirely up to a higher power, believing that she had little information to contribute:

Every school that they go to cause I always praying and say Lord you know I don't know what school, wherever school you have them to go to, whatever school they go to, that's the school you pick, I thank you Lord, so that's it. And they're good schools.

It is quite striking how little some parents thought that school mattered for learning, relative to what the child contributed through hard work and a "good attitude."

Tisha, an experimental mover and 32-year-old mother of two, explained that despite how awful the children's schools were, it was up to the child to "get what she needs." She dismissed private schooling in light of what children contribute to their own education.

That school is crazy. I have to pray for her, it's like I send my child to hell every day and then I expect her to get good grades and learn. But like I said it's up to the individual 'cause she could separate herself from that and she could get what she needs. And she could keep going or she could fall into that crowd to which she's a follower and she'll mess herself up....

...you can send a hard head to a private school and it's not gonna make a bit of difference. You can send a good child to what you might think a not-so-good school and as long as they focus and pay attention it'll benefit them.

Even once aware of a new school choice program, some parents opted to keep their children in their current schools.

Now they have the program with the school system where you can pick. If your child goes to a school that's—how do they put it? That didn't do too well at certain times, you can choose the school that did better. I guess it's doing better than the school that they currently go to or was going to... Neither one of us would be able to take her to school so that's why she's going to go to the school she's going to, which is just as much of a school. It's not a great school but I always tell them, you can make it 'cause the education is there. It's really what you try to get out of school—you know what I mean.

Some MTO children did change schools after a move. Why didn't school changes lead to improved outcomes? One reason is what I call the decoupling of school change from school quality. Many parents made decisions about schooling that had little or nothing to do with academic quality. During interviews we asked, "What makes a good school? Do you think your child's school is a good school? Why?" Few parents focused on high school graduation rates, rigorous courses, and college preparation. For many poor families, choices about where to live involve proximity to transportation, supportive family members, and moms' jobs. Schools come after that.

I came to the area. I knew where the subway was, right down the street here. So here it was convenient for me to still catch the bus to work. So that's why I picked here.

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Successfully enhancing education opportunities for the types of families who participated in the MTO experiment will depend on gaining a better understanding of how these families view the school choice process and where it fits into their overall strategies for well-being.

Even parents who placed more value on school choices still didn't take school quality as seriously as other issues. They trusted that "the education is there" if their child wants to work for it. Some sought a sense of comfort and a welcoming atmosphere rather than academic rigor. Parents wanted to feel that they were welcome in their child's school or that the teachers really cared for the children.

He had a great teacher last year, Miss Worth. She'd always say to each child, no matter if they were bad or good, "My little miracle! You're my miracle! I want you to do better tomorrow." She'd hugged each child as they pass by her. That's great! You don't find many teachers, not even parents that can do that!

Some school changes happen involuntarily and cannot really be considered "school choice." Forced school transfers and expulsions accounted for some of the school mobility experienced by MTO youth, especially by boys. Several parents explained that their children were "put out" of school, usually because of behavioral problems and attendance issues. One respondent told us that her 3rd grader got into a fight with his teacher and "swung on her" because "he said she was choking him and he was trying to get away…it's two sides to every story. I wasn't there."

Conclusions

The interviews conducted in Baltimore shed light on the explanations for why the MTO experiment didn't lead to better schools and educational achievement. Many MTO parents told us about frightening conditions in their children's schools and their concern for their children's well-being. Yet these fears and realities did not always translate into efforts to remove their children from these environments. Poor mothers and their children juggle myriad extreme conditions, and schooling is not always on the top of the list. Murder, crippling drug addiction, suspicious landlords, diabetes, and depression took center stage in the lives of many, if not most, MTO families we interviewed. While neighborhood change could be a necessary condition to protect children and improve their schooling, it is not sufficient in light of the deep morass of issues that characterize the lives of the urban poor.

Many social policies assume that all low-income parents approach opportunity the same way that most middle-class families do, and that the main problem is a lack of financial resources. Our interviews provide a reminder that poor families are not just wealthy families without a bankbook. Poor parents often have less information about school choice programs and school quality than do middle-class parents. Poor families may approach opportunities, and in particular may secure schooling for their children, in ways that diverge from many research models of educational decision making.

These insights are also relevant to school choice policy in general. Many cities, including those in which MTO families were living, have expanded school choice programs. No Child Left Behind gives parents the option of sending their child to another school if the current one doesn't make adequate progress. The success of these policies in enhancing education opportunities for the types of families who participated in the MTO experiment will depend on gaining a better understanding of how these families view the school choice process and where it fits into their overall strategies for well-being.

Obviously, only part of the solution lies in information enrichment. Years of failed urban school-reform efforts and concentrated residential poverty exacerbate the passive orientations that poor families have toward schooling. The evidence in the research base to date suggests that housing and neighborhoods need to be an important consideration when thinking about solutions to educational inequality. Recurring themes in our interviews support integrated policies and interventions that target schooling in conjunction with housing, mental health services, and employment assistance.

Stefanie DeLuca is assistant professor of sociology and an affiliate of the Center for Social Organization of Schools, both at Johns Hopkins University.

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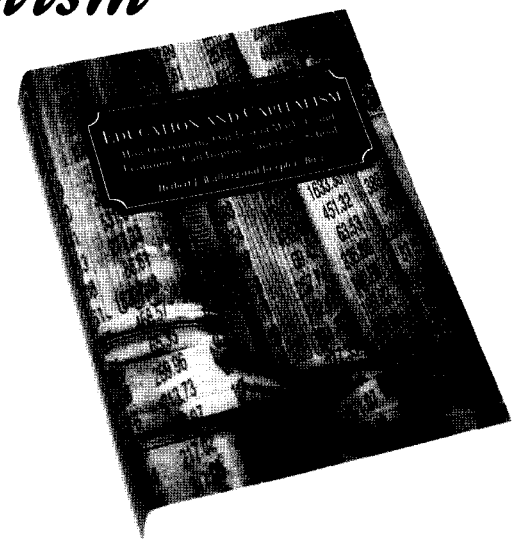

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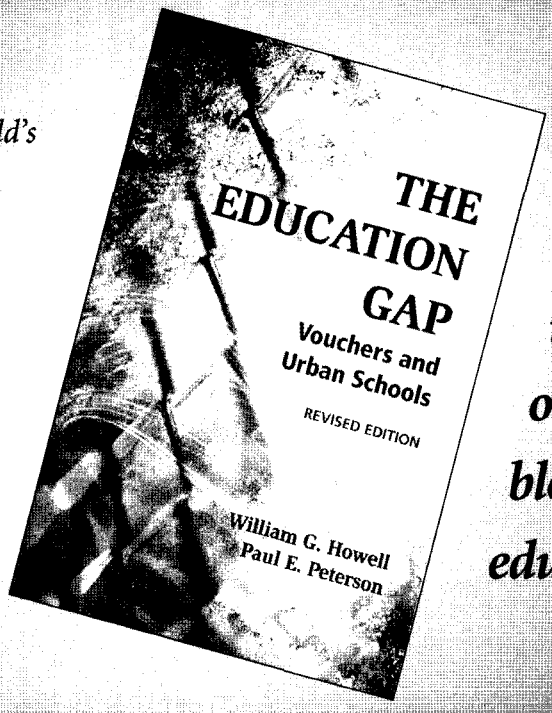

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Will NCLB

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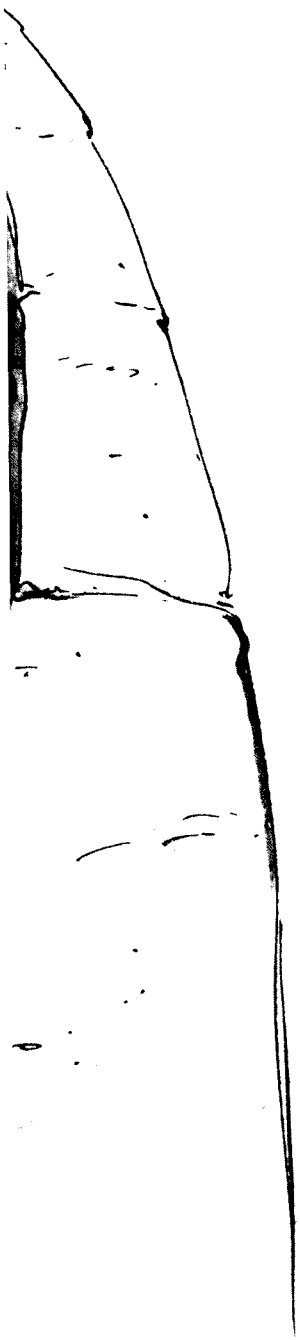
Hit the Wall?

Congress hopes to finish work on the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) before the presidential primary season begins in January 2008, though it is unclear whether that deadline will be met. The six-year-old law was originally passed by Congress with strong bipartisan support, but now faces opposition from both the right and the left. Can the law be saved? The editors of Education Next join in the debate on NCLB's future, assessing the law's shortcomings and prescribing what Congress should do to avert a disaster.



Crash Course 40

Frederick Hess and Chester Finn argue that NCLB was bound to crash and burn, since the machinery of the law is not powered by a coherent model of educational change or a sound view of the federal role in education.

A Lens That Distorts 46

Paul Peterson defends NCLB-style accountability but challenges Congress to fix the measuring stick used to evaluate schools.

Testing the Limits of NCLB 52

The real problem with NCLB, says Michael Petrilli, is that it wrongly assumes the federal government can force recalcitrant states and school districts to do their job well.

Basically a Good Model 57

NCLB is a groundbreaking civil rights law that has already improved the nation's schools, counters Dianne Piché, who offers a vigorous defense of the statute.

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Crash Course

NCLB is driven by education politics

Enacted in 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) began with the resounding promise that every U.S. schoolchild will attain "proficiency" in reading and math by 2014. Noble, yes, but also naive, misleading, and in some respects dysfunctional. While nobody doubts that the number of "proficient" students in America can and should increase dramatically from today's woeful level, no educator believes that universal proficiency in 2014 is attainable. Only politicians promise such things. The inevitable result is weary cynicism among school practitioners and a "compliance" mentality among state and local officials.

In hindsight, NCLB's passage was less about improving schools or fostering results-based public sector accountability than about declaring fealty to a gallant but utopian ambition, one that the statute welded to a clumsy, heavy-handed set of procedural mandates.

NCLB is, in fact, a civil rights manifesto masquerading as an education accountability system. Its grand ambition provided a shaky basis for policymaking, rather as if Congress asserted in the name of energy reform that America will no longer need to import oil after 2014 or fought crime by declaring that by that date all U.S. cities would be peaceable kingdoms.

BY FREDERICK M. HESS AND CHESTER E. FINN JR.

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NCLB's particular brand of hubris has solid precedent. Picture John Kennedy pledging in 1961 that "America will get 75 percent of the way to the moon by decade's end." Or former President Bush and the governors solemnly declaring in 1990 that the U.S. would be 12th in the world in math and science by the year 2000. Indeed, it's practically un-American to aim for anything less than the top.

Moreover, NCLB's backers can legitimately argue that they had already spent nearly two decades asking state and local officials and education leaders to address mediocre school performance and stubborn race- and class-linked inequities in educational outcomes (see Figure 1). In that light, the passion-drenched unseriousness infusing NCLB is forgivable, even honorable.

And NCLB indeed has virtues: it produced long-overdue school transparency, focused unprecedented attention on achievement, created urgency where lethargy had ruled, and offers valuable political cover to determined superintendents and principals.

Kennedy's promise was kept in just eight years, when it turned out that money, brainpower, and determination could surmount the technical challenges posed by a moon landing. The "first in the world" goal, however, was not attained and quickly became the stuff of mockery.

Invitation to a Backlash

The NCLB accountability system was adopted with scant attention to principles of sound public-sector accountability, how the statute's many pieces fit together, or whether they could be competently deployed through the available machinery. Meanwhile, the statute's rhetoric invites a backlash that may not only gut the law, but also discredit the increasingly fruitful goal-setting, school-changing, choice-conferring results that have marked education reform since 1983.

As the calendar rolls toward 2011 and 2012, and sharp increases in proficiency rates become necessary, the number of schools failing to make adequate progress will rise precipitously. Unless current standards are eased, thousands of schools that communities had long regarded as effective are going to be tarnished. Claims of moral urgency and vague paeans to accountability are unlikely to prove much of a match for community pride and fears for property values. Moreover, many of those schools, while doubtless less effective than they ought to be for at least some kids, are pretty decent and far better than the urban-disaster schools, where the case for mandated interventions is unarguable.

There's nothing wrong with lofty ambitions. Yet political compromises meant that NCLB's grand aspirations were saddled with sputtering machinery and weak sanctions. Few Americans realize that, for states to keep their Title I dollars, they need only to set goals, administer tests, report results, and see that districts intervene in specified ways in low-performing schools. NCLB doesn't actually mandate that kids *learn* anything. If the kids don't learn, or if their schools don't improve, no sanctions follow (save possible embarrassment) so long as officials comply with the procedural requirements. The money keeps on flowing.

There's nothing wrong with lofty ambitions. Yet political compromises meant that NCLB's grand aspirations were saddled with sputtering machinery and weak sanctions.

NCLB's architects thought they were devising an elaborate plan to alter the behavior of thousands of schools and millions of educators, drawing on a mix of goals, rewards, sanctions, choices, and sunlight. They overlooked the fact that effective behavior-changing regimens are rooted in realistic expectations and joined to palpable incentives and punishments; NCLB provides none of these.

Aspirational Politics

The conventional account, as told by NCLB champions like Congressman George Miller, Senator Ted Kennedy, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, or advocates like the Education Trust or Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights, is that the law capped a 12-year effort to advance education accountability from Washington. They attribute any apparent failures to implementation glitches, foot dragging by state and local officials, educator recalcitrance, or lack of funding.

In this telling, 1989's Charlottesville summit begat Bush's America 2000 plan, which begat conjoined twins—Clinton's Goals 2000 plan and Improving America's Schools Act

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(IASA)—which somehow begat NCLB, with each generation better able than its ancestors to drive education reform and boost student achievement.

That chronology is right, but the record of steady progress forward is questionable. An evolution of sorts did take place, with Uncle Sam's hand pressing down harder and harder and with ever more elaborate provisions meant to keep states, districts, and schools in line. Several pending reauthorization proposals—notably those from the Aspen commission chaired by former governors Tommy Thompson and Roy Barnes—would extend that pattern and press down harder still from Washington, with more rules, regulations, and commands.

That may well be what Congress ends up doing. But it is unlikely to work as intended, because it misdiagnoses the essential problem.

In promoting education reform during the 2000 campaign and after, President Bush fatefully chose to focus on compassionate moralism (e.g., "the soft bigotry of low expectations") rather than on reshaping the structures and incentives of K–12 schooling. In so doing, he reflected standard Washington practice: the rhetoric of education policy is more often about social justice than about incentives or instruction. Enlisting allies in the civil rights community who were eager to see improved outcomes for poor and minority students, Bush was able to forge a bipartisan coalition stronger than the status quo defeatism of the National Education Association.

What is remarkable is that, at the very moment of supposed conservative "victory" on federal education policy, the Bush administration embraced a moralistic conception of accountability and big-government enforcement rather than the pragmatic, incentive-focused model that had emerged from three decades of conservative critiques of grandiose Great Society designs.

It's a mistake to depict NCLB either as perfecting its statutory predecessors or as a coherent engine of behavior modification. NCLB's provisions are a hodgepodge of Texas precedents, "New Democrat" reforms, liberal nostrums, and proposals by countless constituencies, all superimposed on programmatic architecture and rules that had accumulated since Lyndon Johnson worked in the Oval Office.

Many Prototypes

Embedded within NCLB's accountability system are three distinct, discernible models of educational change that have been awkwardly welded together.

Model one would make transparent the performance of students across the nation, providing an X-ray to show parents, educators, and policymakers how different schools and groups are performing in key subjects. Model two would deploy "behavior modification" accountability methods, refined through decades of public sector reform, to force low-performing schools and districts to set goals, assess effectiveness, and do better. And model three would set "shoot-the-moon" targets and use the federal bully pulpit to exhort leaders in states and districts to improve.

Education Reform since the Signing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Figure 1)

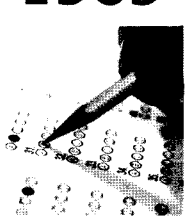
1965

President Johnson signs the ESEA, with Title I funding for poor students as the focal point

1968

Expansion of ESEA programs, including the Bilingual Education Act

1969



First National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) administered

1970

President Nixon requires that Title I schools receive state and local aid comparable to that of non-Title I schools

1978

President Carter signs reauthorization allowing Title I funds to be spent "schoolwide" if more than 75 percent of students are eligible

SOURCES: Erik W. Robelen, "40 Years After ESEA, Federal Role in Schools Is Broader Than Ever," *Education Week*, April 13, 2005; U.S. Department of Education

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Each of these approaches is plausible on its own terms. And each has a place in federal policy. *But they cannot reasonably be linked to one another*, as NCLB tries to do. They entail discrepant views of the federal role in education and employ discordant mechanisms. The result isn't working.

For example:

—The value of an "X-ray" of the nation's school performance has long been recognized. NCLB's dictate that all states regularly test students in key subjects marked a historic success. The accuracy of the picture is compromised, however, when this cross-sectional look at student achievement becomes the basis for gauging the performance of schools and educators, much less for triggering interventions or remedies. We don't judge doctors based on whether their patients are sick today but by how much patient health improves under their care. Judging professional performance on the basis of a one-moment-in-time X-ray encourages questionable behavior, leads states to play games with standards, and threatens to discredit the X-ray itself.

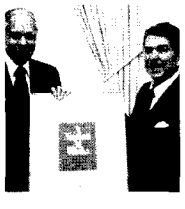
—Prodding public sector institutions to set goals, monitor performance, and then reward excellence and address mediocrity has been a signal success for reformers on both the left and the right. Decades of studied effort, touted in iconic books like *Reinventing Government* and championed through the 1990s by the Gore commission, make clear that sensibly structured accountability systems encourage self-interested workers to take goals seriously, focus on outcomes, and employ all the levers at their disposal to produce those outcomes. But we compromise such "behavior modification" when those on the ground view the targets as unattainable. If workers know they are unlikely to succeed, the goal becomes to avoid trouble when they fail. By making failure inevitable, unrealistic goals have the perverse

Decades of studied effort make clear that sensibly structured accountability systems encourage self-interested workers to take goals seriously, focus on outcomes, and employ all the levers at their disposal to produce those outcomes.

1981

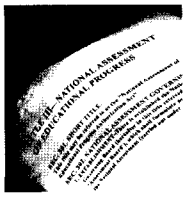
President Reagan consolidates many programs into a block grant and reduces ESEA funding

1983



"A Nation at Risk" report details declining American educational achievement

1988



Districts are required to assess Title 1 schools based on standardized tests; Congress creates the National Assessment Governing Board, to set NAEP policy

1989

At Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, President Bush and governors convene to discuss federal role in education

1994

President Clinton reauthorizes the ESEA as the Improving America's Schools Act; states required to develop standards and aligned assessments for all students

2002

President George W. Bush signs the No Child Left Behind Act; ESEA's testing requirements expanded, along with its accountability measures

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effect of focusing employees on compliance and encouraging actions that will mask "failure."

—Bully pulpit exhortation is a legitimate role for federal officials. Dating at least to Bill Bennett's colorful tenure as secretary, the Department of Education has sometimes been a valuable podium from which to promote and energize school reform. Setting high bars and challenging state and local officials to meet them provides political cover to leaders, while lighting fires under laggards. It's great to shine a bright light on performance and then laud or shame schools, states, and districts based on that performance. Yet such efforts are discredited when they are based on X-rays ill-equipped to readily trace progress or when behavior modification schemes lead local officials and educators to react by devoting their energies to bureaucratic compliance on the one hand, and loophole exploitation on the other.

Washington should indeed press states to track performance levels, but "adequate progress" should be based primarily on the academic value that schools add, (i.e., the achievement gains their pupils make), not merely the aggregate level at which students perform.

Rube Goldberg structures are generally unstable as well as unattractive, and the stability of this one is further menaced by the cracking foundation under it: education federalism circa 1965. NCLB's architects failed to appreciate how weakly that foundation supported even the lighter burdens of Goals 2000 and IASA, both passed in 1994. Those measures had taken for granted that the LBJ-era mechanisms for distributing federal dollars allocated for needy children via state and local education agencies were also suited to a regimen of school reform.

That hierarchy of responsibility—from Washington to state education department to local school system to school and finally to classroom—has been the basis of federal education policy since passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. But it was never designed to support a results-based accountability system; repair schools or districts; function in an environment awash in charter schools, home schooling, and distance learning; or address the dysfunctions of the very agencies charged with its implementation.

Although IASA and Goals 2000 were not nearly as demanding as NCLB, close listeners could already hear the foundation cracking. Yet to our knowledge, none of NCLB's architects even paused to ask whether a hierarchy decently suited to distribute money via certain formulas could manage a very different and much more aggressive federal role or the exigencies of school improvement. To accomplish these tasks competently, the federal government would require much more direct authority over resources, assessments, low-performing schools, and interventions. By no means are we endorsing efforts to give the feds that kind of control. We are, however, noting that operating in a federal system without such grand powers requires that federal officials legislate and act with an eye to what they can and cannot constructively do. The seeming nonchalance with which NCLB's proponents tossed new responsibilities onto this precarious governmental base betrayed a dangerous unconcern.

Bundling together the X-ray assessment, behavior modification, and aspirational jawboning also presumes that federal intervention on all three counts was and is appropriate everywhere in the land. Not true, and another challenge to traditional notions of education federalism. In fact, several states, including Florida and Massachusetts, already had X-ray assessment or behavior modification systems more advanced than those required by NCLB. Moreover, the fact that these systems were not linked to a fixed date for universal proficiency was arguably a strength, not a problem.

What to Do

Can this law be saved? Yes, indeed, but only if we thoughtfully separate its key components from one another and from naively heroic expectations.

It is appropriate for Uncle Sam to demand that every state provide a fine-grained image of student achievement. It's reasonable also to insist that states develop sanctions, remedies, and interventions for schools and districts that are performing badly and not improving. Washington should indeed press states to track performance levels, but "adequate progress" should be based primarily on the academic value that schools add (i.e., the achievement gains their pupils make), not merely on the aggregate level at which students perform.

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Moreover, states that are already moving on these fronts *do not need* federal intervention, much less cookie-cutter prescriptions. It's folly for Congress to draft school-level modifications; far better to require that lagging states act, then move to withhold funds—big bucks, including, if necessary, the whole Title I payment—from any that sit on their hands or post unacceptable results.

It's valuable, too, for Washington to set ambitious goals and exhort everyone to attain them. But the constructive way to do this is by promoting transparency, setting benchmarks, rewarding high achievers, pointing fingers at laggards, and clearing political obstacles. With a consistent metric, call it a national standard, accompanied by national tests, everyone's performance can be fairly tracked and compared. If the Jefferson School lags behind the Franklin School; if Hispanic youngsters in Tucson fall behind Hispanic pupils in San Antonio; if Springfield can't keep pace with Sacramento; if Ohio is making gains but Kentucky isn't, all these and more should be readily visible. Comparisons should be easy and swift. Washington can competently see to this. But it cannot competently micromanage what state, districts, or schools do. And it shouldn't try.

Even the Great Society's most daring and important victories avoided the sweeping hubris of NCLB. Neither the Civil Rights Act of 1964 nor the Voting Rights Act of 1965, both remembered now as towering triumphs, ever sought to change precinct-level behaviors. Backed by the National Guard and armed with clear, concrete, and fairly straightforward goals, federal officials focused entirely on forcing a limited number of recalcitrant states to adopt specific changes. This is the kind of role in which federal leadership has a reasonable record of success.

That accomplishment can happen in education, too, if we couple an emphasis on readily comparable gauges of performance and progress with real consequences for mediocrity and inertia.

NCLB could have a bright future, if it gets an extreme makeover.

Frederick M. Hess is director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). Chester E. Finn Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and senior fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution. They are coeditors of the new book, No Remedy Left Behind: Lessons from a Half-Decade of NCLB, *from AEI Press.*

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A Lens That Distorts

NCLB's faulty way of measuring school quality

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) put schools under the microscope by requiring that they report, annually, the test-score performance of students in grades 3 through 8, and, again, for grade 10. As President Bush said shortly before he signed the bill into law, "We need to know whether a curriculum is working. We need to know whether the teachers, the methodology that teachers use is working. We need to know whether or not people are learning. And if they are, there will be hallelujahs all over the place. But if not, we intend to do something about it."

Five years later, it has become clear that the microscope NCLB uses to get the information the president said he wanted contains a lens that distorts. Many good schools—both charter schools and inner-city public schools serving the disadvantaged—are not recognized as such, while many poorly performing schools are given a pass. If NCLB is to fulfill its mission, Congress needs to make some major repairs or risk seeing those opposed to all forms of school accountability assume control of the political battleground.

I do not join those opponents of accountability. We do not raise any principled objections to holding schools accountable or testing students annually. On the contrary, the evidence

BY PAUL E. PETERSON

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suggests that accountability has had some positive benefits for American education. The reading and math scores of 4th and 8th graders on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have risen steadily since NCLB was put into place. If it cannot be proved that those gains are due to improved school accountability, it is heartening to know that Margaret Raymond and Eric Hanushek found, in more precise estimates of accountability impacts, somewhat larger gains on the NAEP in those states that were the first to put accountability systems into place (see "High-Stakes Research," *features*, Summer 2003).

Still, the current federally mandated accountability system falls well short of what is needed. The gains made by 4th and 8th graders do not translate into higher levels of performance once students reach the age of 17. Instead, high school achievement has remained as stagnant as ever, and high school graduation rates continue to hover around the industrial world average.

Two things are needed to get the most out of accountability. First, the lens used to look at schools must be reground so that distortions are minimized. Once that repair has been completed, accountability's bright light needs to shine on the performance of individuals, that is, on students, teachers, and administrators, not just on schools.

A Distorted Prism

Most people would agree that a good school is a place where students are learning, and a poor school is one where that is not happening. But NCLB's way of measuring school performance does not look directly at how much individual students are learning from one year to the next. Instead, a school is evaluated according to whether or not its students are making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward full proficiency by 2014. In that year, every tested student must be achieving at the state-determined proficiency level. By next year, the midpoint between 2002 and 2014, the percentage of students proficient at a school is expected to have increased by roughly half the distance from where it was when the law was enacted. Various subgroups of students, defined by ethnicity, gender, economic disadvantage, and need for special education, must be making comparable progress. While some exceptions to those requirements are allowed, schools are said to be A-OK only if the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level is moving forward "adequately." Schools where that is not happening are identified as "not making AYP" or, after two years, "in need of improvement." In common parlance, they have "failed."

Evaluating schools by the AYP measuring stick is typically justified on the grounds that it ensures that "no child shall be left behind." While this sounds both noble and egalitarian, it in fact expects those schools that had a lower percentage of students scoring at the proficient level in 2002 to make more rapid progress over the ensuing years than those with higher-performing students. Both are expected to arrive at the same point by 2014 as well as to make more rapid progress each year. It is not unlike a race between the turtle and the rabbit, in which the turtle is asked to complete a two-mile run while the rabbit need only traverse 200 meters in the same stretch of time.

The consequences of this peculiar accountability system are very different, but equally damaging, for two contrasting types of schools. For those schools blessed with high-performing students (as a result of learning either at home or in earlier grades), the proficiency standard to which they are held accountable is often much too low. If the country is to have a better-educated citizenry, the schools serving higher-performing students need to lift their performance well above levels of mere "proficiency." As for those schools whose responsibility is the education of large numbers of low-performing students (as a result of either minimal education at home or bad instruction earlier in life), it is not reasonable to expect that every child will reach the state proficiency standard by the end of 3rd grade and every grade thereafter. Applying that criterion puts schools serving the disadvantaged at risk of being said to "fail," even if they are doing a fine job of enhancing the skills of their students.

The lens used to look at schools must be reground so that distortions are minimized. Once that repair has been completed, accountability's bright light needs to shine on the performance of individuals.

One can get a pretty good fix on how much students are learning by tracking individual student test scores from one year to the next. When students at a particular school

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are outpacing the typical student in the rest of the state, most people would agree the rate of learning is, at least, better than average. When student gains lag significantly behind average statewide gains, most people might agree that the situation deserves attention by school boards and administrators, if only to make sure that below-average performance in any given year is nothing more than a statistical aberration.

Schools serving the poor, the disabled, and the educationally disadvantaged face a greater challenge, as they must make rapid progress from one year to the next to escape the "failed school" designation.

Any well-designed measuring stick should provide that kind of basic information, especially if it purports to identify schools that are or are not making Adequate Yearly Progress. Martin West and I ("Is Your Child's School Effective?" *check the facts*, Fall 2006) discovered just how inadequate the AYP measuring tool is when we tracked student progress in Florida. We compared pairs of schools, checking to see whether students were learning more at the one said to be making AYP than at the one said to be failing. Thirty percent of the time the opposite proved to be the case. Any measuring stick that gets something wrong 30 percent of the time is itself a failure.

The errors are systematic. If a school is blessed with initially high-performing students, it is likely to be given a pass by NCLB, even if students are not learning much from one year to the next. Schools serving the poor, the disabled, and the educationally disadvantaged face a greater challenge, as they must make rapid progress from one year to the next to escape the "failed school" designation. As a result, they are often found to be "failing," even when the gains made by their students exceed those in "passing" schools.

Simplistic Dichotomy

The imperfections of the NCLB measuring stick are magnified by the fact that it divides all schools into just two categories, pass or fail ("making AYP" or not). The practice borrows from a more common propensity that has unfortunately crept into American education in the name of helping the challenged. Even elite universities, such as my own, allow professors to give students "pass-fail" grades. I have learned from bitter experience that such a grading system both gives students license to do nothing and, ultimately, provides less information to those who rely on grades as a way of ascertaining whether students have learned something. (Generally speaking, the "behind-the-scenes" rule is to treat a pass as a fail, causing further distortions.)

In days gone by, and even now in traditional schools, teachers graded students over a five-point scale that ranges from A to F. NCLB needs to rediscover that ancient practice. States have already shown the benefits of using a multiplicity of cut points. Florida employs an A to F scale, providing a much more intuitive way of telling families and citizens about the quality of their schools. New York grades schools on a four-point scale, which, if not as good as the traditional grading system, would be satisfactory were it not for the fact that, in New York, 4 is good, 1 is bad. (Can you hear the chants? "We're number four!")

Regrinding the Lens

A five-point A to F scale that focused strictly on student growth at a school would greatly enhance the transparency of the accountability system. Admittedly, such scrutiny was not possible when NCLB was originally enacted into law, simply because at the time the legislation was passed there was no way in most states of tracking student progress over time. Since 2002, however, several states (North Carolina, Texas, and Florida, for example) have put into place at least the beginnings of systems that allow for tracking of student performance from one year to another. At the time NCLB is reauthorized, Congress needs to mandate such tracking systems in all states, and then ask states to use the systems as a way of identifying which schools are effective, and which are not.

To be sure, not every state could implement such a system immediately, so Congress would need to allow for a period of transition from the current policies to the new ones. Introducing a growth approach via the "safe harbor" provisions of the law may be the politically feasible way to begin. States with high standards and quality information on individuals' performances over time could be given a second way

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of showing that schools are making AYP. If given this option, they will have every incentive to migrate to the new system as quickly as possible, as the distortions of the existing approach intensify.

Distortions across States

Thus far we have focused on how the NCLB accountability lens provides misleading information about school quality within states. Equally disconcerting, the accountability measuring stick provides grossly misleading results when states are compared to one another. The cause of the distortion: allowing each state to establish its own standards and its own definition of proficiency, thereby generating 50 different definitions of the same concept.

The meaning of the word "standard" has its origins in the flag or emblem carried high in battle in order to martial a fighting force toward a fixed objective. If standard-bearers head off in inconsistent directions, they direct portions of the battle force toward divergent objectives, opening the army to flank attacks. Accordingly, "standard" came to mean something that was fixed, such as the specific weight for an official coin or the unchanging value of a precious metal against which the value of paper currency could be compared.

It is thus an oxymoron to hold students accountable to more than one standard, as is the case under NCLB, which allows each state to establish its own standard, no matter how widely it diverges from some national definition. Frederick Hess and I show that a very few states—only Massachusetts, Maine, and South Carolina—have as high a definition of proficiency as the one originally set nationally by those who administer the NAEP. (For more, see "Keeping an Eye on State Standards," *features*, Summer 2006.) Standards in most states fall far short of that national mark, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Tennessee being the most extreme laggards. So, by official definitions, Johnny may be deemed a proficient reader in North Carolina but not if he should move to South Carolina.

So varied are state standards that the relative rigor of a state's proficiency definition is a better predictor of the percentage of schools said to be "failing" (not making AYP) than the overall quality of student performance in the state, as estimated by average NAEP scores. The correlation between the proficiency standard and the percentage of schools failing to make AYP rate is 0.44. The correlation between the actual level of student proficiency on the NAEP in the state and the percentage of schools identified as "failing" is only negative 0.31.

Clearly, AYP is giving information that is at least as much political as it is substantive. In Massachusetts, for example, 43 percent of the students failed to make AYP, despite the fact that the state has the highest-performing students in the country. Why? Because Massachusetts has one of the highest standards in the country, a standard as high as the one NAEP uses. Conversely, only 7 percent of the schools in Tennessee are failing, though the state ranks near the bottom in terms of school performance. Why? Because Tennessee has one of the lowest operational definitions of proficiency in the country. The pattern nationwide is laid out in Table 1.

We are not necessarily proposing the NAEP or Massachusetts standard of "proficiency" as the correct one. If one is going

The accountability measuring stick provides grossly misleading results when states are compared to one another. The cause of the distortion: allowing each state to establish its own standards and its own definition of proficiency, thereby generating 50 different definitions of the same concept.

to expect every child to reach that level by the year 2014, one can be quite certain it won't happen. Even world leaders in education do not come close to reaching that goal. In 8th-grade math, for instance, only 73 percent of the students in Singapore are proficient by the NAEP definition of the word, despite the fact that Singapore has the highest-performing math students (see Figure 1).

That fact helps to clarify a basic dilemma that NCLB confronts as long as it continues to use the 2014 goal of full proficiency as its benchmark. Either the word "proficiency" will have to be dumbed down to mean little more than "basic" understanding of the given material, or a new way of measuring school performance must be introduced.

The simplest solution: use a high standard, such as the one employed by the NAEP, when holding students accountable for reaching full proficiency, if they are to receive an academic diploma, but hold schools accountable for achieving a high but realistic rate of student growth from one year to the next.

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To Get Fewer Failing Schools, Set Easier Standards (Table 1)

States whose students score poorly on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tend to have more schools that fail according to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) guidelines. But the connection (correlation = -0.31) is not as tight as one might expect, as many states with low-performing students report fewer failing schools simply because they set lower standards (correlation = 0.44).

State	Percentage of Schools Not Making Adequate Yearly Progress (2005)	Percentage of Students Proficient on the NAEP (2005)*	Rigor of State Proficiency Standards (2005)
U.S. Median	**23**	**32**	**C**
Hawaii	66	22	B+
Florida	64	29	C
Rhode Island	56	28	B-
District of Columbia	55	10	C
Nevada	53	23	C
New Mexico	53	18	B-
South Carolina	53	29	A
Alabama	47	20	D-
New Hampshire	47	39	
Idaho	43	34	D
Massachusetts	43	45	A
North Carolina	42	32	D-
Alaska	41	29	D+
Indiana	40	32	C-
New Jersey	39	39	C
California	38	23	B
Missouri	35	30	A
Oregon	32	33	C
Illinois	27	30	C
Delaware	26	33	C-
Kentucky	26	27	C+
Colorado	25	35	D
Maryland	25	32	C
Ohio	24	36	C
Maine	23	35	A
Connecticut	20	37	C
New York	20	33	C
Washington	20	37	C
Wyoming	20	35	A
Pennsylvania	19	36	C
Virginia	19	36	D+
Georgia	18	26	D-
West Virginia	17	23	D-
Louisiana	16	20	C
South Dakota	16	36	D+
Arizona	14	25	D+
Vermont	14	39	
Minnesota	13	41	
Texas	13	31	D+
Utah	13	32	D+
Michigan	12	32	C-
Mississippi	11	17	D-
Iowa	9	34	D+
Kansas	9	37	C-
North Dakota	9	37	C
Montana	7	37	C+
Tennessee	7	25	F
Oklahoma	3	25	F
Wisconsin	2	36	C-
Arkansas		28	B-
Nebraska		35	D
	Correlation = -0.31		
		Correlation = 0.44	

Note: Percentage of students proficient on the NAEP is equal to the average of the state's 4th- and 8th-grade math and reading proficiency levels.

SOURCES: National Center for Education Statistics, State Education Reforms website (nces.ed.gov/programs/statereform/), Table 1.6; National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress; Paul E. Peterson and Frederick M. Hess, "Keeping an Eye on State Standards," *Education Next*, Summer 2006

Accountability

Who should be held accountable? That question brings me to NCLB's final distortion: exactly who or what is being held responsible. In ordinary language, only individuals, not entities such as schools, can be held accountable. We hold drivers, not cars, responsible for accidents. Or, if cars are faulty, we hold responsible those who made them. But under NCLB, only entities (schools, school districts, states), not students, teachers, or administrators, are held responsible for what is happening. To fix the NCLB accountability system, we need to find ways of holding accountable the individuals, that is, the students and teachers, who are involved in the education process.

At one time, student promotion to the next grade was conditional on performance, and graduation from high school depended on learning a specific body of material. Gradually, it has become standard practice to promote virtually all students from one grade to the next, regardless of whether they have learned the material. Such practices are justified on the grounds that holding a child back for poor performance only undermines self-esteem and aggravates learning problems. Minimal high-school graduation requirements are similarly justified on the grounds that having a diploma is better than not receiving one, regardless of what is learned.

Recently, some cities and states have introduced policies that return to more traditional practices. The results have been surprisingly promising. In Florida, the performance of 3rd graders jumped the first year they were expected to pass a test if they were to move on to 4th grade (see "Getting Ahead by Staying Behind," *research*, Spring 2006). Those held back benefit from being required to repeat the 3rd grade. In Massachusetts, the expectation that students pass a 10th-grade test if they are to graduate from high school spiked student performance the first year the law was introduced, with continuing gains in subsequent years. Internationally, Ludger Woessmann has shown that students score higher in countries that require students to perform well on comprehensive examinations than in countries that, like the United States, have no such expectations (see "Crowd Control," *research*, Summer 2003).

Teachers and administrators should be held accountable as well. Once the other elements of a well-designed accountability system have been

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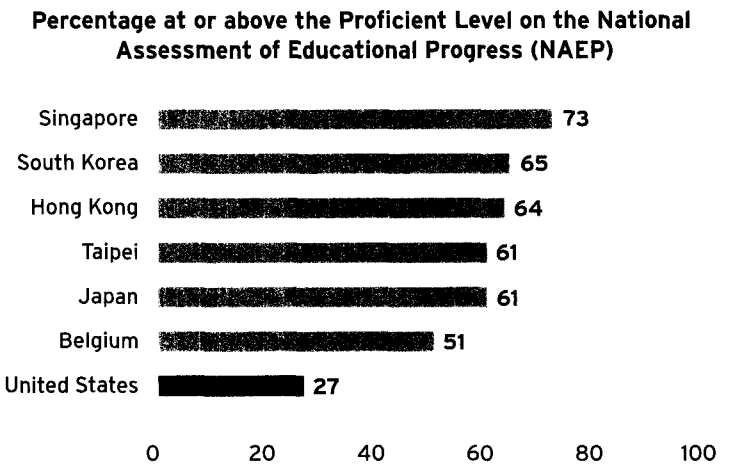
put in place, it is reasonable to hold teachers accountable for student learning. As Thomas Kane and his colleagues have shown (see "Photo Finish," *research*, Winter 2007), the best measure of teacher quality in any given year is how much students learned from that same teacher the preceding year. The research simply confirms what every school child knows: certain teachers are consistently effective, while others are not.

Once the information is available to track student progress from one year to the next, one can identify the classrooms in which the most, and least, learning is taking place. That information can be used to reward the high performers and to counsel the low performers, who should be dismissed if they remain consistently ineffective classroom teachers. Of course, any teacher can have a bad year, and any accountability system may make an error, so all personnel decisions must be made by administrators who are fully informed of particular circumstances. But until teachers are held responsible for the performance of their students, it is unlikely that accountability systems will prove effective.

Finally, an effective accountability system requires strong administrative leaders, who should be held responsible for the learning gains realized at their school.

Unrealistic Expectations or Low Standards (Figure 1)

Using the NAEP proficiency standards for 8th-grade math, the percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency in countries with the highest-performing students is much higher than in the United States, but is still a long way from 100 percent proficiency.



Note: For countries other than the U.S., percentages have been estimated by linking the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) to student performance on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

SOURCE: Gary W. Phillips, "Linking NAEP Achievement Levels to TIMSS," (American Institutes for Research, 2007)

The Political Problem

It is rumored that influential interest groups in Washington and key members of Congress are considering many of the changes I have proposed in this essay. Let us hope so, but one should not be optimistic about the outcome of the legislative process in the absence of strong, sustained public support for reforms along these lines. The defects in NCLB, as originally written, are not accidental. The law took the form that it did because Congress navigated among powerful political interests—those of unions, suburbanites, state and local education officials, and other interested parties. Had teachers been held accountable, union opposition would have blocked the law's enactment. Had states not been given the option to set any standard they wanted, many state and local officials would have balked at excessive federal control. Had states been required to put in place a data collection system that tracked student performance over time, privacy fanatics would have insisted that every child had a right not to be known, even to those responsible for the child's education. Had every school been measured for growth in student performance, many a suburban district (as well as its board and superintendent) would have been found wanting. Had students been held accountable, groups of students and parents would have raised strenuous objections.

In 2001, lawmakers displayed sheer political genius when they came up with a law that could be sold to the public as an egalitarian policy that would leave no child behind. By insisting that every child reach a minimum level of performance in 2014 (well beyond the political lifetime of many of the key decisionmakers), the law left most parts of the educational system untouched and limited the rigors of accountability to the schools that served the most challenging populations. If that was politically shrewd, it is educationally problematic. The best and the brightest were given a pass. Meanwhile, excellent schools serving the most challenged, whether charter schools or high-quality inner-city public schools, were placed at the greatest risk of being called failures, even when they were successes.

None of this can be altered without regrinding and polishing the lens through which NCLB's accountability light shines on America's schools. If we cannot soon come to believe what we are shown, the whole microscope will be tossed into history's dustbin.

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Testing the Limits of NCLB

Implementation is not the problem

It's popular in Washington to declare No Child Left Behind (NCLB) an excellent statute (even "99.9% pure," as Secretary Margaret Spellings once claimed), but complain about its "implementation." Many individuals on Capitol Hill and in advocacy groups appear sincerely to believe that with the right people calling the shots in the U.S. Department of Education, making good decisions, and acting wisely, the law could work as intended.

Is this true? Is implementation the problem? Or are NCLB's shortcomings much deeper? From my admittedly biased perspective as a former Bush administration official in the Department of Education (DOE), I examine that question through a case study of one of the law's many ambitious promises: that students in schools in need of "improvement" or "corrective action" can transfer to a better school or receive free tutoring from a private provider at the district's expense.

These provisions test the limits of well-intended implementation. Unlike other parts of NCLB that were foisted upon the administration by congressional Democrats (such as the law's "highly qualified teachers" mandate), these policies enjoyed strong support from senior DOE officials, including Secretary of Education Rod Paige. They aligned with core Republican principles of choice and

BY MICHAEL J. PETRILLI

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competition. Yet by all accounts, the provisions have disappointed. In 2005, fewer than 1 percent of eligible students participated in NCLB school choice and just under 20 percent took advantage of the free tutoring (see Figure 1). Did the administration botch the implementation of even these favored programs? Or is something else to blame? And what are the implications for NCLB writ large?

Parent Information, School District Resistance

It almost goes without saying: in order for parents to take advantage of school choice programs, they must know that they exist. Yet experience has shown that in the early days of any choice program, parents lack the information they need to weigh their options. That helps to explain why each of the nation's school-voucher programs got off to such a slow start. In the federally funded Opportunity Scholarship Program in Washington, D.C., for example, almost half of the available vouchers went unused in the first year of the program because its organizers didn't have adequate time to inform parents. Other voucher and charter school programs nationwide have shown similar dynamics.

So under the best conditions, informing parents of their options under NCLB would be a difficult challenge. But the construction of the law presents a unique problem: it requires local school districts to inform parents of their options, yet doing so is at odds with districts' own interests. After all, few big-city districts have better schools to offer parents anyway, and few are eager for parents to spend the districts' dollars on tutors outside the school system's domain. Plus, if districts don't spend the required amount on choice or tutoring (a sum equal to 20 percent of their federal Title I allocation), they can use these dollars for their own initiatives. In other words, it's not "use it or lose it," it's "use it for choice and tutoring or use it as you see fit."

The disincentives to districts to inform parents of their options were easy to see as soon as the law's ink was dry, and help to explain why so few students are participating in NCLB school choice and tutoring. Let's examine what DOE tried to do to address these challenges, and consider why its efforts largely failed.

Strategy #1: Appeal to districts to do the right thing

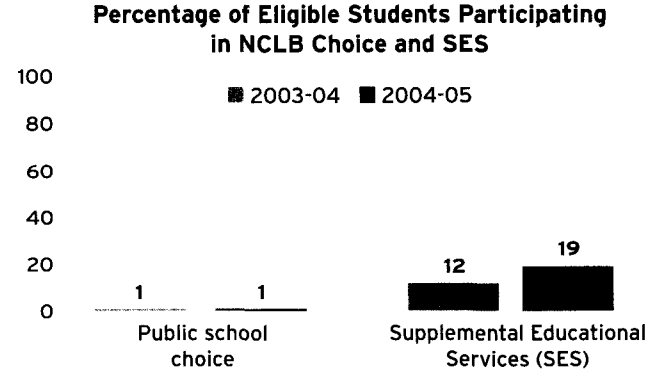
The statute is relatively clear, though not elaborate, about districts' responsibilities when it comes to communicating with parents. They must provide information "in an understandable and uniform format and, to the extent practicable, in a language that parents can understand." The districts must explain why the child's school is "in need of improvement" in the first place, including "how the school compares in terms of academic achievement to other elementary schools or secondary schools served by the local educational agency and the State educational agency." They must make clear "the parents' option to transfer their child to another public school" or "to obtain supplemental educational services [free tutoring] for the child." These notices must come "not later than the first day of the school year" following the identification of a school "in need of improvement." Districts obligated to provide supplemental educational services must annually give parents a "brief description of the services, qualifications, and demonstrated effectiveness" of each approved tutoring provider in the district.

In the first version of its "Public School Choice: Non-Regulatory Guidance," published in December 2002, the department built on these basic statutory requirements to encourage districts to provide helpful information to parents: "The [local educational agency] should work together with parents to ensure that parents have ample information, time, and opportunity to take advantage of the opportunity to choose a different public school for their children."

That same month, in its "Supplemental Educational Services: Non-Regulatory Guidance," the department encouraged districts to "consider multiple avenues for providing general information about supplemental educational services, including newspapers, Internet, or notices mailed or sent to the home."

Unintelligent Design (Figure 1)

Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), districts get to keep the funds that go unspent on public school choice and supplemental educational services (SES). It is therefore not surprising to find that few eligible students are participating in these programs.



SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, "National Assessment of Title I: Interim Report"; U.S. Government Accountability Office, "No Child Left Behind Act: Education Actions Needed to Improve Local Implementation and State Evaluation of Supplemental Educational Services"

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While school districts didn't see much benefit in touting NCLB's choice opportunities, several advocacy groups did. The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (HCREO), and the Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation (GEO) viewed parental outreach as central to their mission.

DOE took another bite at the apple in August 2003, when it published an updated version of its supplemental educational services guidelines. Frustrated that the letters some districts were sending home actually discouraged parents from taking advantage of free tutoring, the department added new language. "Any additional information in a notice should be balanced and should not attempt to dissuade parents from exercising their option to obtain supplemental educational services for their child." This mild rebuke, in the form of non-binding "guidance," was hardly going to spur districts to change course.

Still trying to appeal to districts' better angels, in May 2004 the department published *Innovations in Education: Creating Strong District School Choice Programs*. This colorful booklet culled "best practices" from five school districts with vast experience implementing their own public school-choice programs. Under headings like "Communicate Clearly About NCLB Choice Options" and "Provide Personalized Follow-Up," the publication gave concrete, actionable advice to districts that wanted to implement the choice provisions effectively. Importantly, it also provided sample letters (from Milwaukee) that demonstrated how districts could communicate to parents in a straightforward, jargon-free way. DOE printed 50,000 copies of these booklets, distributed them widely, and posted a version online. It also used the booklet at a variety of forums and conferences.

But from the department's perspective in Washington, boosting districts' know-how didn't seem to make much of a difference; those pesky perverse incentives hadn't gone away. So the department devised a new strategy: if you can't work through the districts, work around them.

Strategy #2: Empower the outsiders

While school districts didn't see much benefit in touting NCLB's choice opportunities, several advocacy groups did. Organizations such as the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (HCREO), and the Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation (GEO) viewed parental outreach as central to their mission. One of BAEO's objectives, for example, is to "educate Black families about the numerous educational options available."

So administration officials responded enthusiastically when these organizations applied for grants under the department's Fund for the Improvement of Education (FIE), also known as the "Secretary's discretionary fund." The department doled out $1.5 million to BAEO, $900,000 to HCREO, and $750,000 to GEO. Each of these groups set out to inform parents of their NCLB options in target cities. BAEO's "Project Clarion" launched aggressive outreach campaigns in cities such as Detroit, Atlanta, and Philadelphia. Using a mix of radio ads, grass-roots communication, and media relations, the organization sought to inform parents of their NCLB school choice and free tutoring options. The project had some success; awareness of NCLB and its choices increased in BAEO's target cities from 37 percent to 72 percent over the three years of the initiative.

Unfortunately discretionary FIE funds were quite limited, and these targeted campaigns couldn't come close to having a national impact. But the department's Parent Information and Resource Centers program (PIRC) had a substantial amount of money (almost $40 million in 2006). Despite its name, PIRC wasn't designed to inform parents about school choice options. A holdover from President Clinton's Goals 2000 law, the centers' primary role was to fund parent education programs, with a focus on early childhood. Regardless, department officials used the grant application process to establish priorities (i.e., bonus points) for PIRCs willing to do the work of informing parents of their options under NCLB. Soon the nation's 70-odd PIRCs were engaging in parental information campaigns of one sort or another.

It's hard to know for sure whether any of these outside-the-system efforts worked. To this day there are no good, comparable, city-by-city data on participation rates in NCLB school

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choice or supplemental educational services, so it's impossible to know if participation spiked in communities where the PIRCs and other groups targeted their efforts. With millions of children nationwide eligible for choice and free tutoring, even these activities have to be seen as mostly symbolic.

Strategy #3: Offer carrots

DOE soon came to believe that what mattered most was whether districts themselves "bought into" the choice and tutoring provisions and launched aggressive outreach campaigns. Districts have some particular advantages: They have access to student information nobody else has: they know exactly who is eligible for choice and tutoring. They have the power to send information home in students' backpacks and, even more importantly, to instruct school principals, counselors, and teachers to give parents information about these options at school-sponsored events such as back-to-school night and during parent/teacher conferences. As the *Innovations in Education* booklets made clear, parents are most likely to trust and act on information coming from their child's teacher and principal.

So with the arrival of Secretary Spellings in the second term of the Bush administration, DOE tried a new tactic: replace the law's perverse incentives (which pushed districts to avoid aggressive parental outreach) with carrots, offers that would encourage them to play ball. The department launched two different pilot programs. First, in August 2005, it allowed four districts in Virginia (and later another 12 districts in four additional states) to flip-flop the order of NCLB school choice and free tutoring. Now districts with schools identified as "in need of improvement" would have to offer supplemental educational services immediately, and could delay NCLB school choice until the next year. In return, those districts had to engage in aggressive parental outreach, demonstrated by significantly improved participation rates in the NCLB school choice and tutoring programs.

The department launched a second pilot with the free tutoring provision. In 2002, Secretary Paige had issued a regulation that disallowed districts "in need of improvement" from providing tutoring directly; to say this rankled the big-city districts is a vast understatement. In 2005 and 2006, the department gave several urban school districts (Anchorage, Boston, Chicago, Hillsborough County [Florida], and Memphis) permission to serve as tutoring providers, even though they were themselves "in need of improvement" under the law. Once again, the deal was that these districts had to show significant progress with parental outreach, as measured by student participation. Specifically, they were required to "notify parents of the availability of SES [supplemental educational services] in correspondence that is simply written and in a language that parents can understand…notify parents of the availability of SES by letter to the student's home and by at least two other means…[and] broadly circulate information in the community about SES."

These pilots certainly made political sense. Secretary Spellings was under heavy pressure from the education establishment to show greater "flexibility" with the implementation of the law (see "Texas Hold 'em," *features*, Summer 2007). Even members of Congress had come to agree that NCLB school choice should kick in after supplemental educational services. And Spellings

With the arrival of Secretary Spellings in the second term of the Bush administration, DOE tried a new tactic: replace the law's perverse incentives (which pushed districts to avoid aggressive parental outreach) with carrots, offers that would encourage them to play ball.

felt she had to allow at least some big-city districts to serve as tutoring providers, in part to placate the Council of the Great City Schools, which had been a vocal and courageous advocate for the law. So if she was going to make these policy changes anyway, why not get something in return?

Whether she got a good deal remains to be seen. Results from a third-party evaluation of these pilots have not yet been published. Allowing districts to serve as tutoring providers has had all kinds of deleterious effects on the supplemental educational services program. For example, a *Wall Street Journal* editorial reported that Chicago, Boston, and Hillsborough County are all using "administrative hurdles to make it very difficult for private and faith-based tutoring programs to reach students." Of course, no matter what the impact might

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Federal policymakers should consider this a key lesson: While it's hard to force recalcitrant states and districts to do things they don't want to do, it's impossible to force them to do those things well.

be in a handful of cities, these pilots will have no effect on the larger national picture.

The Dog That Didn't Bark: Wielding the Stick

The Department of Education still has not tried getting tough with states and districts deficient on parental outreach. This isn't the case for the law as a whole; the administration has shown remarkable courage in withholding administrative funds from states for various infractions, such as not testing new elementary school teachers before they enter the classroom (as required under the law's "highly qualified teachers" provision) or failing to include English language learners or special education students in the state's assessment system.

So why did the department not take similar actions when it came to choice and tutoring? Simply, it's a matter of gray. The examples cited above are black-and-white: either states tested their new teachers, or they didn't. The law is clear about what is required; enforcing the statute is fairly straightforward. This is not the case for parent outreach and information; most districts were, in fact, living up to the *letter* of the law. They sent parents bulletins about their choices and posted information online. Sure, many letters were full of jargon, written to dissuade parents from taking advantage of their options, and a wholly inadequate mechanism for breaking through information overload anyway. But "going through the motions" is not illegal. Simply said, the department did not have grounds to initiate enforcement actions.

Of Hubris and Humility

Let's return to the original question: Could NCLB work as intended with the right people calling the shots in Washington, making good decisions and acting wisely? When it comes to the law's failings, is "implementation" really to blame?

At least when it comes to the law's school choice and tutoring provisions, the answer is clearly no. The Department of Education, especially under Secretary Paige, was firmly committed to the success of these provisions. It tried multiple strategies to make them work effectively, with little success. It's hard to imagine what else any administration could do to make the provisions work, at least within the confines of the statute.

But that doesn't mean that changing the law is necessarily the solution, either. There may be *no* solution to some of these problems because they are inherent in our federalist system. Federal policymakers should consider this a key lesson: While it's hard to force recalcitrant states and districts to do things they don't want to do, it's impossible to force them to do those things well. Washington can coerce states and districts to follow the letter of the law, but not the spirit. And when it comes to complicated school reforms like empowering parents to choose a new school for their child, "going through the motions" isn't good enough.

When Congress reauthorizes NCLB, it will need greater humility. Rather than trying to mandate transformative change, Uncle Sam should simply provide political cover to reform-minded local leaders. When it comes to NCLB choice and free tutoring, for example, the federal government could offer extra money for districts that volunteer to implement these reforms. Only districts committed to their success would receive the funds. And DOE would get out of the business of trying to force recalcitrant districts to play along.

This is precisely the strategy embedded in the Teacher Incentive Fund, a $100 million effort that funds local pay-for-performance initiatives. Several big-city districts agreed to experiment with this controversial and promising reform, thanks to the availability of "free" money from the federal government. That sort of demonstration program could work well in other policy domains, too.

A voluntary school-choice grant program is not as bold and exciting as NCLB's promise that every child trapped in a failing school will have an exit. But this approach is more in line with the capabilities and political realities of the federal government. Meanwhile, most reforms, including those intended to expand school choice, are going to have to develop the old-fashioned way—from the bottom up. That can be slow and frustrating, but it's the American way.

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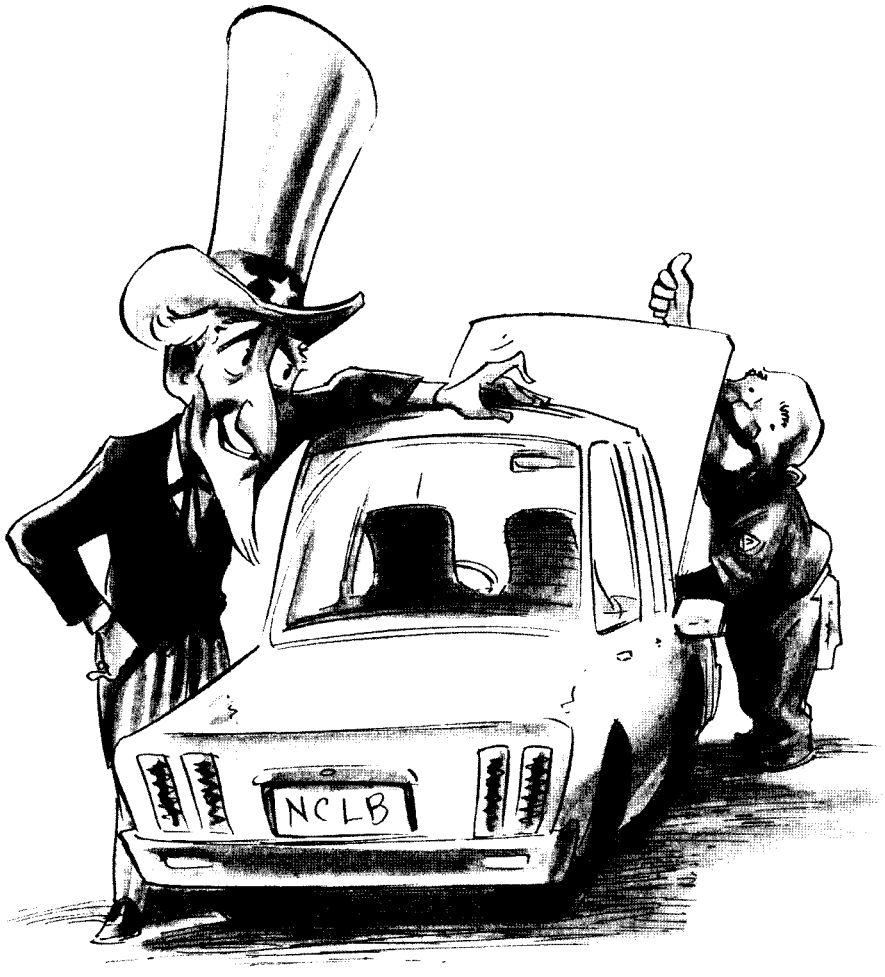

Basically a Good Model

NCLB can be fixed

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) may be the most vilified act of Congress in modern times. Just about anybody can find something in the law to get worked up over: the testing rules, "highly qualified teachers," funding shortfalls and so on. It's great fodder for presidential candidates, too, one of whom recently went so far as to blame the childhood obesity problem on NCLB and to equate companies providing tutoring to low-income students to Halliburton. Funny thing is NCLB is actually doing some good things for real people, many of them students who historically have been shortchanged in our public schools.

I was an early, proud supporter of the law, and I still am. My civil rights colleagues and I fought for some of its tougher provisions, like accountability for subgroups of students, the 2014 proficiency deadline, requiring states to submit plans for the equitable assignment of teachers, and providing a way out for kids trapped in failing schools. By now, most of the criticism of NCLB—some legitimate but some

BY DIANNE PICHÉ

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How long does it take a cutting-edge civil rights law to "work"? Could a credible argument have been made in 1969, five years after passage of the Civil Rights Act, that the ambitious law was "not working" and therefore ought to be abandoned?

ginned up by special interests opposed to real accountability—seems pretty old and tiresome.

Let's examine some of the grenades most commonly lobbed at NCLB.First, there is the oft-heard complaint that the measurement system for accountability is all wrong. Why? Because NCLB doesn't call for measuring students' growth from year to year. Instead, the measurement system in the law compares the proficiency levels of this year's 3rd graders to last year's 3rd graders. This is also called the "status model."

Suggesting that NCLB 1.0 is flawed because it did not explicitly provide, back in 2001, for "growth models" is like saying my 2001 desktop was a bad buy because in 2007 it can't run Windows Vista or streaming video. Virtually none of the states had the technology and other capacity to design and implement growth-measurement systems in the early years of this authorization. The fact that Education Secretary Margaret Spellings has approved only seven to date is not because she's not eager to see many states move in this direction. There simply aren't, even today, many states ready, willing, and able to carry out a credible, statistically sound growth-based accountability system.

Since 1994 the "status model" has been the accountability paradigm embedded in Title I, and in many state accountability systems as well. It was based, in part, on public health models that aspire, for example, to increase numbers of annual healthy births and immunized kindergarteners and decrease things like malnutrition, disease, and teen pregnancy. Significantly, it was not until sometime after NCLB's final passage that the noise level about the "status" model and the plea for growth measures became audible. And this was not because states suddenly had vast new capacity to measure growth. They didn't. Instead, increasingly, leaders of the education establishment (i.e., school boards, administrators, and the teacher unions) were doing their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) math in the context of the 2014 deadline. They rightly feared that, unlike the Clinton administration, the Bush administration was determined to enforce the law, particularly with regard to assessment and accountability. Simply put, they hoped that with a growth model, they might get credit for *some* amount of improvement in test scores, even if the requisite numbers of students were not actually proficient.

This political background is important context for the debate taking place in Congress. Virtually nobody disputes the merits of allowing states to base their accountability systems on the value a school or teacher adds to a student's knowledge and skills. But when it comes time for Congress to get down to actual legislative language, members will have to choose whether to open the door to all comers, including states with pitifully low standards (compared to those of the National Assessment of Educational Progress), deficient data and student-tracking systems, and a poor track record on including English language learners and students with disabilities. Or they can take the more prudent course, accede to the secretary's good judgment, and limit the "growth" option to those states that can demonstrate both the capacity and the rigor required to bring students to proficiency within a specified period. Thus, simply arguing "growth measures good, current law bad" may in the end not be very helpful to the deliberations on Capitol Hill and could well undermine the efforts of those who favor only those growth systems that can meet tough standards for rigor, reliability, and inclusion of all students.

Then there's the suggestion that the 2014 proficiency deadline is crazy. Says who? Certainly not the parents whose children attend persistently low-performing schools and for whom even one school year is too much time to lose.

Increasingly we are seeing high-poverty, high-minority schools across the country that are achieving outstanding academic success. In high-achieving schools, proficiency for all students is possible *this year*. Let's do what we can with NCLB to drive the dollars and incentives to the schools that are replicating the no-excuses approach to teaching the children of the poor.

Common Ground?

Perhaps surprisingly, my fellow forum authors and I agree on the importance of NCLB's core aspirations:

- Transparency and public reporting of student achievement data
- The need for high standards pegged to postsecondary education and careers
- Regular assessment in reading and math
- Accountability based on assessment results
- Options for parents.

We even agree on some of the more nuanced, yet potentially powerful, improvements Congress and states could enact to strengthen education reform:

- Differentiated consequences
- Continued efforts to measure growth from year to year
- Measuring effectiveness and attaching rewards/consequences for administrators and teachers.

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Finally, we may actually agree on the most radical proposal from the standpoint of the more than 40-year history of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): Congress should not continue to subsidize failure after providing years of assistance and the opportunity to improve. There are a variety of ways to remove funding from chronically low-performing schools and transfer it to better schools (including moving the dollars in the figurative "backpacks" of the students) that merit serious consideration.

Our disagreements reflect our fundamentally different beliefs about the role of the federal government itself, particularly with respect to advancing the interests of the poor and minorities. Since when has leaving it all up to the states helped the poor and minorities achieve equality of opportunity? Not when it came to voting rules. Not when it came to public accommodations. Not when it came to desegregating schools in the aftermath of *Brown v. Board of Education*. And certainly not now, when the achievement gaps based on race and class are as virulent as ever, with only modest signs of abatement.

Of course, not everything is working perfectly yet. School choice and supplemental educational services were not high on the political priority list under the first Bush administration, but it does not follow that these two vital provisions for parents cannot be made to work. It often takes a period of years (sometimes even a complete authorization cycle) for a controversial new provision to take root. For example, most states did not pay much attention to the "accountability lite" provisions in the Clinton-era Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), nor did that administration do much to signal to states that it would enforce IASA's requirements for "corrective action" and school improvement. It took another authorization and a clear signal from the Bush administration that the federal government was serious about accountability in order for the states to come up with plans to hold their own schools and districts accountable.

Moreover, there are encouraging signs of bipartisan support for proposals to add some real teeth to the public school transfer options in NCLB. Currently, parents may choose a better school when their child's school fails to make AYP, but as the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law has called it, the choice option is "a right without a remedy." School districts implement the provision only halfheartedly and many argue a lack of space in successful schools. The interdistrict provisions in the law are weak, and charter options are not meaningful in states with arbitrary limits on new charter schools.

The Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights, along with the Aspen Institute's NCLB Commission and other proponents, have proposed tough new measures to guarantee public school choice to children who attend persistently low-performing schools. One proposal would deny states that do not provide parents and children with demonstrably better choices their Title I money. States would have the obligation to create and offer those children in the worst schools seats in better-performing schools. To increase seats, states could lift caps on the number of charter schools, expand successful schools, or provide for interdistrict transfers. A second proposal would require an "audit" to determine whether capacity in better schools actually exists and, if so, where. Finally, the Aspen Institute and a number of civil rights organizations favor enabling parents to take legal action when rights conferred under NCLB, like the right to place their child in a better-performing school, are violated. Congress should consider how best to target funding to the schools, leaders, and models that have the best record of success in high-poverty communities. But the bottom line is that unless and until the money is used to leverage dramatic change, there is unlikely to be any marked change. And without dramatic change, achievement gaps are unlikely to close any time soon. The status quo is a powerful player to be reckoned with in the struggle for educational equity.

The Pace of Reform

NCLB is in many respects the latest in a long line of efforts in the policy and legal arenas to promote equity and opportunity in the public schools, including desegregation cases, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the original ESEA, and school finance and adequacy cases in the states.

How long does it take a cutting-edge civil rights law to "work"? Could a credible argument have been made in 1969, five years after passage of the Civil Rights Act, that the ambitious law was "not working" and therefore ought to be abandoned?

This particular legislation needs to be strengthened by ensuring high state standards, reliable assessments, realistic school-improvement measures, an equitable distribution of effective teachers, and real parental choice. Those of us—on the left, right, and middle—who believe in the transformative power of education need to draw more from the work of the increasing numbers of urban schools that are demonstrating *how* to succeed with large numbers of poor and minority students despite the odds. We need to learn from the contagious successes of outstanding public schools and choice programs like the Amistad Academy in Connecticut, the Green Dot schools in California, and the voluntary interdistrict transfer program in St. Louis.

Abandoning NCLB now would be the height of cynicism. Instead, like the civil rights movement itself, the education reform movement is in dire need of creative thinking, committed education leaders, and informed, involved parents—all united in our belief in the worth and value of every young life and each child's potential to learn and do great things.

Dianne Piché is a civil rights lawyer, teacher, and advocate and serves as executive director of the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights.

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Somewhat Different Neighborhoods, but Similar Schools
Compared to similar families who did not win the "Moving to Opportunity" lottery, families who used a restricted housing voucher found neighborhoods with lower poverty rates and a more educated population, but the characteristics of the schools the children attended changed only marginally.
Neighborhood Characteristics
Moved with restricted voucher
Control Group
19
12
75
25
Poverty Rate
Unemployment Rate
Minority
Adults with College Degree
School Characteristics
Moved with restricted voucher
Control Group
63
82
24
for Free Lunch
Minority
Average Test Performance (Percentile)
Percentage
NOTE: The neighborhood characteristics for the appropriate control group were calculated by subtracting the estimated effect of receiving a restricted voucher from the average neighborhood characteristics of families using restricted vouchers.
SOURCE: Authors' calculations from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development data

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New Kids on the Block

Results from the Moving to Opportunity experiment

If only we could move poor kids out of high-poverty, inner-city neighborhoods. Moving to more affluent neighborhoods would surround children with more educated adult role models, stronger educational values, and better community resources. The children would benefit from higher-quality schools and the peer influences of high-achieving classmates. We would be sure to see improvement in their academic performance. Right? Maybe. Research has in fact found surprisingly little convincing evidence that neighborhoods play a key role in children's educational success.

To assess the influence of neighborhoods on children's education, we need to compare large numbers of children in similar families who reside in different communities. Unfortunately, the task is not as simple as finding families who already live in higher- and lower-poverty neighborhoods. Even if these families share characteristics that we can measure, such as income and parental education levels, there may be differences we cannot measure that both led these otherwise similar families to reside in their respective neighborhoods and influence the academic performance of their children. This possibility leaves us uncertain about how much neighborhoods, as compared to family influences, matter for children's academic performance.

BY LISA SANBONMATSU, JEFFREY R. KLING,
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What we really want is to be able to identify low-income families in high-poverty neighborhoods who would all prefer to live in better areas. We need some of these families to relocate to lower-poverty communities, but which families move and which remain must be decided by a process outside their control. If we see differences in academic performance between the children in the relocated families and the children who remained in the higher-poverty neighborhood, we can then be reasonably certain that these changes are due to the new neighborhoods, and by extension the new schools, and not family characteristics.

Despite neighborhood improvements, the families sent their children to schools where students were performing at only modestly higher levels on state exams than in the schools attended by children in the comparison group. Nor did we find evidence of any improvement in reading scores, math scores, behavior, or school engagement.

In 1994, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began a pilot program that provided researchers with just this type of experimental data. From 1994 to 1997, HUD carried out a lottery that awarded housing vouchers to families in five U.S. cities: Boston, Baltimore (see "All Over the Map," *features*, page 28), Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. The Moving to Opportunity (MTO) Fair Housing demonstration program was designed to move poor families with children out of public housing developments located in census tracts with 1990 poverty rates of at least 40 percent and into the private housing market of more affluent neighborhoods.

Families had to take the initiative to enter the housing voucher lottery, thus indicating their preference for moving. The lottery process was used to randomly assign each family to one of three groups. The first group received housing vouchers that could be used to rent in the private market in any neighborhood. These vouchers were part of the preexisting Section 8 (now called "Housing Choice Voucher") program, which awards housing vouchers to low-income families. (Families residing in public housing or using vouchers to rent apartments in the private market are generally required to pay 30 percent of their income in rent.) The second group also received vouchers, but, new to the MTO program, the use of the vouchers was restricted in the first year to low-poverty neighborhoods, that is, a neighborhood in a census tract with a poverty rate of less than 10 percent, based on 1990 census data. The third group did not receive either voucher, creating a control group of families against which those in the other two groups could be compared. During the first four years of the program, a total of 4,248 families entered the lottery. Some 1,209 were offered the Section 8 unrestricted vouchers; 1,729 families were offered the restricted vouchers; 1,310 received no voucher. Forty-seven percent of the families who were offered restricted vouchers and 59 percent of the families who were offered unrestricted Section 8 vouchers "leased-up" new apartments under the terms of the program. In our analysis, families who were offered vouchers but did not use them remained part of the experiment in order to maintain the randomly assigned groups. However, our analysis takes account of the fact that not all families who were offered a voucher used it.

We set out to evaluate the impact of the MTO program on neighborhoods, schools, and educational outcomes across all five cities and on the full age range of children affected by the MTO program. We expected that in 2002, the year of our study, children whose families were offered vouchers of either type would, on average, live in lower-poverty neighborhoods, attend higher-performing schools, and would, as a result, have improved educational outcomes. Our approach was to compare the educational outcomes of children whose families were offered housing vouchers to those of children in families who entered the lottery but were not offered vouchers. Using data on more than 5,000 children between the ages of 6 and 20, we examined mid-term outcomes four to seven years after a family entered the lottery.

We found that families offered housing vouchers in the MTO demonstration program on average moved to communities with substantially fewer poor and substantially more educated neighbors, but with only marginally fewer minority neighbors. Despite these neighborhood improvements, the families sent their children to schools where students were performing at only modestly higher levels on state exams than in the schools attended by children in the comparison group. Nor did we find evidence of any improvement in reading scores, math scores, behavior, or school engagement. At least for the children in the Moving to Opportunity experiment, the promise that better neighborhoods would bring greater academic achievement has thus far gone unfilled.

Data

In 2002, in collaboration with HUD and Abt Associates, we were able to achieve an effective response rate of 90 percent in obtaining information on families participating in the program

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four to seven years after they entered the lottery. We collected data on one adult and up to two children from each family in our study. We interviewed parents and we also interviewed children age 8 or older. In the interviews, parents were asked about their children's academic performance and behavior. Children were asked about their neighborhoods, schools, academic performance, and behavior. Interviewers administered a battery of achievement tests to all children.

Our sample of over 5,000 children is divided roughly equally between girls and boys. The average child is just over 13 years old. The sample consists mainly of minority children; approximately two-thirds are non-Hispanic African Americans and about 30 percent are Hispanic (black or non-black). The majority of the children are from female-headed households.

We identified changes in neighborhoods and schools by constructing address and school histories for each family. We used several sources to compile the address histories, including contacts with the families, the National Change of Address system, and credit reporting bureaus. To determine a neighborhood's level of poverty, we located the street address within the 1990 and 2000 census tracts and used the percentage of residents in the tract who live below the poverty line, as measured by the census data. We interpolated poverty levels for years between 1990 and 2000, and extrapolated post-2000. Our expectation was that neighborhoods have a cumulative impact on children. We incorporated this assumption in our analysis by averaging the characteristics of all the neighborhoods the children lived in between their families' entrance in the lottery and our follow-up in 2002. The longer a child lived in a neighborhood, the more weight we gave that neighborhood's statistics in our calculation.

Interviewers constructed school histories for each child by asking the adult in the family for the names and grades of all the schools the child had attended since the lottery. We were able to use the names and addresses of schools to retrieve information about school enrollment and type from the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data and Private School surveys. State education departments and the National Longitudinal School-Level State Assessment Score Database provided us with average test scores at the schools.

The MTO program had huge success in moving families out of public housing and into lower-poverty neighborhoods. The offer of a restricted housing voucher led to children living in neighborhoods with poverty rates averaging 12.6 percentage points lower than those where families that had not been offered a voucher lived.

Our primary measures of each student's academic performance were the reading and math scores of MTO children from the Woodcock-Johnson-Revised (WJ-R) battery of tests, which the interviewers administered. The WJ-R can be used across a wide range of ages, produces scores that are highly correlated with other commonly used achievement tests, and has been standardized on a nationally representative sample.

We obtained additional information about schools and the students from interviews with the adults and children. We asked children about their school's climate, including its safety and the level of disruption by other students. We assessed how engaged the children were with learning by asking them directly about how hard they worked at school, how often they were tardy, and how many hours they spent reading each day.

Interviewers asked the adults whether their children exhibited various behavior problems. Specifically, we measured a child's degree of behavior problems as the fraction of eleven problems, including "is disobedient at school" and "has difficulty concentrating, cannot pay attention for long," that the adult reported as "sometimes" or "often" true for the child. We also used the survey to gather information from the adults about other educational outcomes, such as whether the child had been held back a grade, been suspended, or taken any remedial or advanced classes.

Measuring the Impact of the MTO Program

In a randomized experiment, the baseline characteristics of the treatment and control groups should, on average, be the same. In the case of the MTO program, the random assignment of housing vouchers by lottery does appear to have created experimental and control groups that are similar on characteristics that we can observe, including age, gender, race, frequency of learning and behavior problems, the employment status and education of parents, and the reported reasons for wanting to move, including the desire for better schools. This experimental setup should allow us to attribute any subsequent differences between the groups as the product of the offer of a voucher. To increase the precision of our estimates of the effects of being offered a voucher, we controlled statistically for the influence of other characteristics of the child and parent on educational outcomes.

After estimating the average effect of being offered a voucher by comparing the entire treatment and control groups, we used information on how many families actually moved to gauge the impact on those who relocated to a new

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neighborhood. Assuming that the families who were offered a voucher were not affected if they did not use the voucher, the size of the impact is essentially the estimated impact of being offered a voucher divided by the fraction of families who moved. Recall that 47 percent of families who were offered restricted vouchers moved to lower-poverty neighborhoods. This means that the impact of actually using a restricted voucher is approximately twice as large as the impact of being offered a restricted voucher.

New Neighborhoods

The MTO program had huge success in moving families out of public housing and into lower-poverty neighborhoods. The offer of a restricted housing voucher, for use in a tract with a poverty rate less than 10 percent, led to children living in neighborhoods with poverty rates averaging 12.6 percentage points lower than those where families that had not been offered a voucher lived, an average poverty rate of 33 percent for the restricted voucher group compared to an average poverty rate of 45.6 percent for the control group. When we calculate the impact for families *who actually used* the restricted vouchers, we estimate that families moved into neighborhoods with an average poverty rate 28 percent lower than the neighborhood in which they would have lived if they had not used the vouchers (see opening Figure).

The impact of using a Section 8 unrestricted voucher was also sizable, though smaller than the impact for the restricted voucher group. Children whose families *actually used* unrestricted vouchers moved to neighborhoods where the average poverty rate was 17 percent lower than the average poverty rate of the neighborhood in which they would have lived.

The schools attended by students in families using vouchers had higher-performing students, but they also had more-advantaged student bodies. As a result, it is unclear whether these schools were actually more effective in raising student achievement.

Whether a family used a restricted or unrestricted housing voucher, children lived in neighborhoods with approximately 5 to 7 percentage points lower male unemployment as well as more college-educated adults and fewer minorities. Restricted voucher families resided in neighborhoods with 13 percentage points more adults with a college degree and 17 percentage points fewer minorities. The changes for families who used unrestricted vouchers were about 30 to 40 percent as large.

What we did not see, however, were families moving en masse to affluent, white suburbs. Even among the families who used restricted vouchers, only 18 percent lived in neighborhoods where the poverty rate was below the state median. Additionally, only 21 percent resided in neighborhoods where more than half of the residents were non-Hispanic whites.

New Schools

The changes in the schools children attended were more modest than the improvements in neighborhoods. Children in families who moved with restricted vouchers attended schools with slightly higher average scores on state exams. The average effect was 9.5 percentiles, bringing the average percentile rank for children whose families used restricted vouchers from the state's 15th percentile to the 24th percentile. Students also attended schools with about 10 percentage points fewer minority students and almost 13 percentage points fewer classmates eligible for the federal lunch program. The use of unrestricted vouchers again produced changes about 30 to 50 percent as large.

The schools attended by students in families using vouchers had higher-performing students, but they also had more-advantaged student bodies. As a result, it is unclear whether these schools were actually more effective in raising student achievement. When we compared their performance to other schools in the same states, taking into account differences in the backgrounds of their students, the advantage for the schools attended by housing voucher students disappeared. We therefore cannot rule out the possibility that the increased school test scores simply reflect differences in the students served and are not indicative of more effective schools.

What did students think of their new schools? We found no differences between students from families offered vouchers and those from the control group, when the children themselves were asked to characterize the climate of their schools. We are unsure how to interpret these results. The lack of positive effects on self-reported measures of school climate could reflect a real lack of improvement, but it could also be due to changes in the frame of reference among students in their new neighborhoods. This certainly must be the case among the youngest children, who never attended schools in their original neighborhoods.

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Student Test Scores

When it comes to improving student test scores, the MTO program does not appear to have had an overall impact (see Figure 1). Our statistical estimate puts the impact of moving with a restricted voucher at four-hundredths of a standard deviation increase in combined reading and math test scores, and the estimate is not statistically significant. We also failed to find evidence that suggests an advantage to using an unrestricted Section 8 voucher.

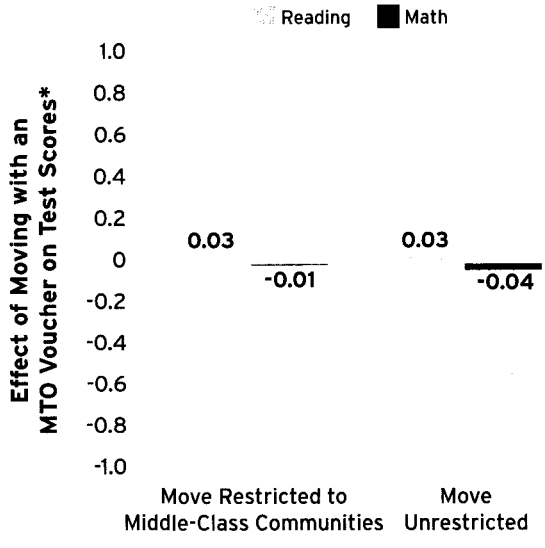
Nor were the impacts of the program more favorable for younger children, who had spent fewer years in high-poverty neighborhoods and, we hypothesized, were more amenable to change. We tested for varying impacts by age in two different ways. First, we divided our sample of children into three roughly equal groups, ages 6–10, 11–14, and 15–20. We then estimated the impacts separately for each age group. We also tested for the possibility that the effect of moving to a lower-poverty neighborhood decreases gradually with the child's age. The estimates of the impact of a voucher on student test scores are statistically insignificant regardless of whether we look within age groups or for a year-by-year correlation.

We did find noteworthy impacts on combined reading and math test scores in two of the five MTO sites. In Baltimore, use of a restricted voucher appears to produce a statistically significant increase in test scores of 25 percent of a standard deviation, an effect that is concentrated among elementary school–aged children. Oddly, in New York, use of an unrestricted voucher is associated with a decline of one-half of a standard deviation. For the three other cities, none of the estimates were large or statistically significant.

We estimated the impact on test scores separately for girls and boys, students with different races and ethnicities, and children grouped by characteristics measured at the time of the lottery that are predictive of low, moderate, and high test scores. Again, we usually failed to find that students from voucher families performed differently than students from the control group. The one exception was the statistically significant positive impact of the use of a voucher on the achievement test scores of non-Hispanic African American children. Among these students, restricted-voucher use is correlated with notable improvements in reading scores, with average scores almost one-fifth of a standard deviation higher than for the control group. The estimated impact of using an unrestricted Section 8 voucher among African American children is not statistically significant and is approximately 0.1 standard deviations. When we analyzed this relationship by MTO site, we discovered that these improvements in reading for African Americans appear only in the Baltimore and Chicago sites. In these two sites, our sample includes virtually no other racial or ethnic groups. Considering the lack of evidence for an impact on African Americans in the other three sites, and the increased likelihood of incorrectly identifying a chance occurrence as a real impact when comparing multiple subgroups within a sample, we encourage readers to interpret these findings with caution.

No Impact in the Classroom (Figure 1)

Using either restricted or unrestricted Moving to Opportunity vouchers to move to a new neighborhood had no effect on student reading or math performance.



Note: Woodcock-Johnson-Revised tests data

SOURCE: Authors' calculations from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Behavior and Attitudes toward School

As with test scores, we generally did not find large, statistically significant differences in behavior or attitudes toward school between children from families with and without vouchers. Students from both restricted and unrestricted voucher families and the control group had similar numbers of behavior problems and were equally likely to have repeated a grade, been suspended in the last two years, or had a parent or guardian called to the school to discuss a problem the child was having. Additionally, we could not find differences between the children in their engagement with school, which we measured with the children's self-reported attention in class and tardiness. Nor were children from voucher families any more or less likely to attend remedial or advanced classes.

There are three exceptions to the similarity between the voucher and control groups. First, moving with a restricted voucher appears to be associated with increased behavior problems for 11- to 14-year-olds. Second, we find that moving with a restricted, though not an unrestricted, voucher

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Moving poor families to neighborhoods that, while less poor, have schools that are only marginally better than those in the original neighborhoods is unlikely to solve the children's academic problems.

has an adverse impact on the behavior of boys. Boys from families that used restricted vouchers scored, on average, one unit higher on the behavior problems index. The estimate for girls from the same group suggests that they may have fewer behavior problems than girls in the control group, but the estimate is not statistically significant. Third, for boys and girls with characteristics associated with higher test scores, the family's use of a restricted voucher appears to be associated with more behavior problems.

Why Didn't Student Performance Improve?

The Moving to Opportunity program moved families into lower-poverty neighborhoods and children into schools where students performed at modestly higher levels. So why were there virtually no improvements in children's test scores, incidence of behavior problems, and school engagement, even among children who were preschoolers at the time their families moved?

One plausible explanation lies in the fact that families who used vouchers later took steps that undid some of the potential advantages of their initial moves to middle-class neighborhoods. Children in families that moved using a restricted voucher resided an average of 3.1 years at their new addresses. Subsequent moves, however, tended to be to tracts that were considerably less affluent than the neighborhoods in which they first used the voucher. Moreover, for many families who remained in their new tracts, the poverty rate in their neighborhood increased around them. The census tracts to which MTO voucher families initially moved had substantially higher poverty rates on average in 2000 than they did in 1990. Despite this trend, however, voucher families did reside in considerably more affluent neighborhoods, on average, than control families.

Second, although families with vouchers moved to less-impoverished neighborhoods, most did not move to racially or ethnically integrated neighborhoods. By 2002, three-fifths of families that moved with vouchers were living in neighborhoods with 80 percent or more minority populations. For a variety of reasons, these neighborhoods may not have high-quality schools or other public services usually found in more-affluent neighborhoods where whites make up a greater share of the residents. We can do little more than speculate about this here, however, because we do not have the data to test whether this was the case.

Third, today many urban school systems offer school choice. In fact, over 30 percent of the control-group children in Chicago and Los Angeles were attending magnet schools. School choice may have allowed families that moved with vouchers to continue sending their children to schools in their old neighborhoods.

The final plausible explanation is related to the relative affluence of MTO families' new neighborhoods. Certainly, voucher families moved to neighborhoods that were substantially less poor, and the improvement was very likely greater than any that could be produced by community-based neighborhood improvement programs. Nevertheless, the neighborhood improvements did not involve moving to truly affluent neighborhoods. Previous nonexperimental studies have indicated that neighborhood effects on academic performance are primarily found in comparisons of children in affluent areas to those in middle-class neighborhoods. Lacking random assignment, these studies are not fully convincing. Nonetheless, it may be the case that children from low-income families who moved into high-income suburbs would experience notable improvements in academic achievement.

In the end, we were surprised and disappointed by the inability of the Moving to Opportunity experiment to help poor children succeed in school. After following more than 5,000 MTO children over five years, we can offer some tentative conclusions about policy interventions designed to improve student performance. Moving poor families to neighborhoods that, while less poor, have schools that are only marginally better than those in the original neighborhoods is unlikely to solve the children's academic problems. Interventions might be more profitably focused on factors more directly related to the child, family, and school. The question remains whether these same conclusions will hold after a full decade of living in new neighborhoods, especially for the youngest children who, because of the MTO program, will have spent their entire lives outside of public housing projects. We will be collecting additional data next year and look forward to learning more.

Lisa Sanbonmatsu is a postdoctoral fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research. Jeffrey R. Kling is senior fellow and deputy director of economic studies at the Brookings Institution. Greg J. Duncan is professor of education and social policy at Northwestern University. Jeanne Brooks-Gunn is professor of child development and education at Columbia University.
Details on these findings are available in "Neighborhoods and Academic Achievement: Results from the MTO Experiment," Journal of Human Resources *41:4 (Fall 2006), 649-691.*

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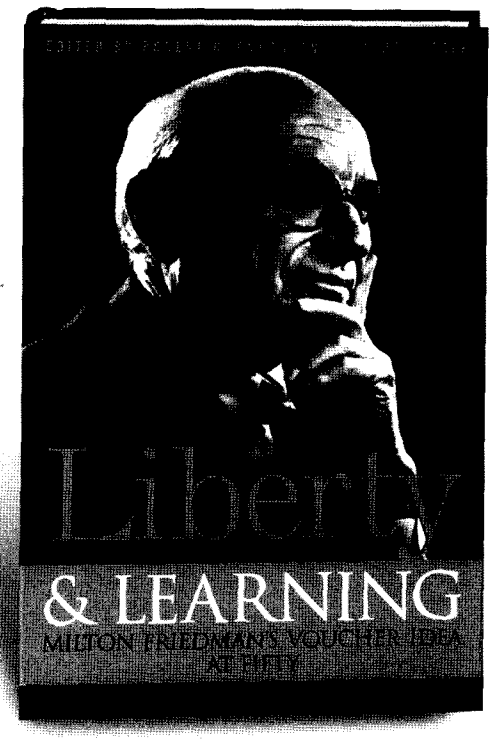

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BY NEAL MCCLUSKEY

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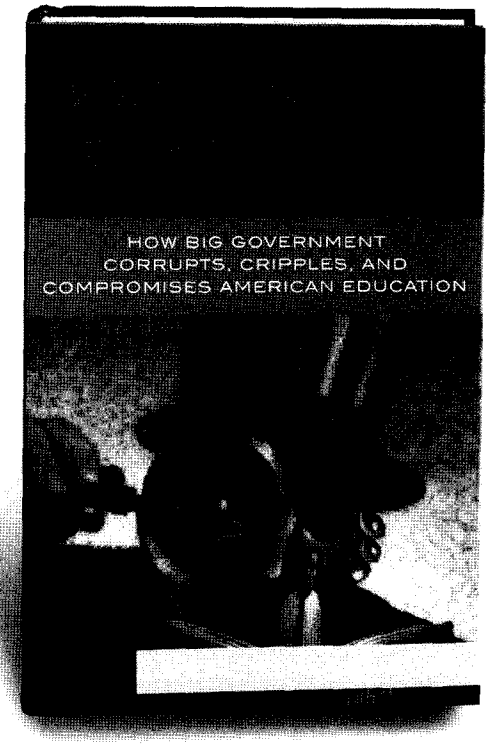

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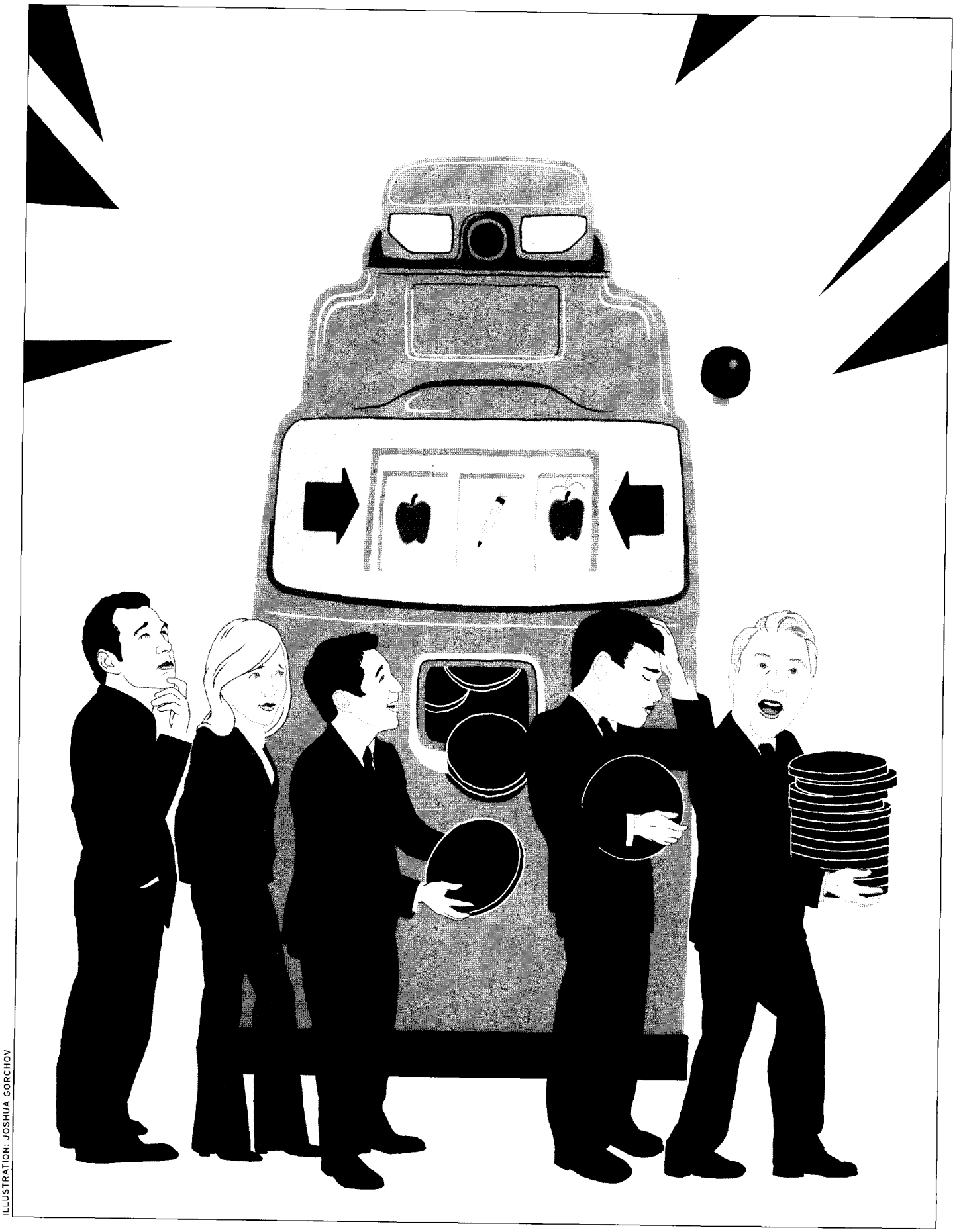

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Do Districts Fund Schools Fairly?

State and federal school accountability programs hold schools to specific standards of academic performance and assume each school is given a fair shake at accomplishing the task of educating its students. But are schools, in fact, treated fairly, at least with respect to funding? Over the past 35 years, reforms adopted in most states have dramatically improved the equity of funding from one school district to another.

But in recent years a new concern has surfaced: What if it's not the district but rather the specific school a child attends within a district that matters most for accessing educational resources? Mounting evidence suggests that districts commonly distribute different amounts of funding, even when schools serve the same types of students. Our research and that of others indicate that schools with predominantly junior teachers receive fewer salary dollars than do schools staffed with veterans. Further, districts often compound these inequities by distributing a smaller share of unrestricted funds to the same schools that are shortchanged in salary dollars. What we don't yet know about school funding inequalities is whether and how these discrepancies have changed in recent years. Nor is there much information available about how spending differences within districts compare to differences between districts in the same state.

IN TEXAS, DIFFERENCES ARE LARGER WITHIN DISTRICTS THAN BETWEEN

BY MARGUERITE ROZA, KACEY GUIN, BETHENY GROSS AND SCOTT DEBURGOMASTER

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Similar Scholars, Unequal Dollars (Figure 1)

Inequity in noncategorical spending between schools in the same Texas school district far exceeds inequity between districts. The picture is similar for total school spending.

Figure 1a

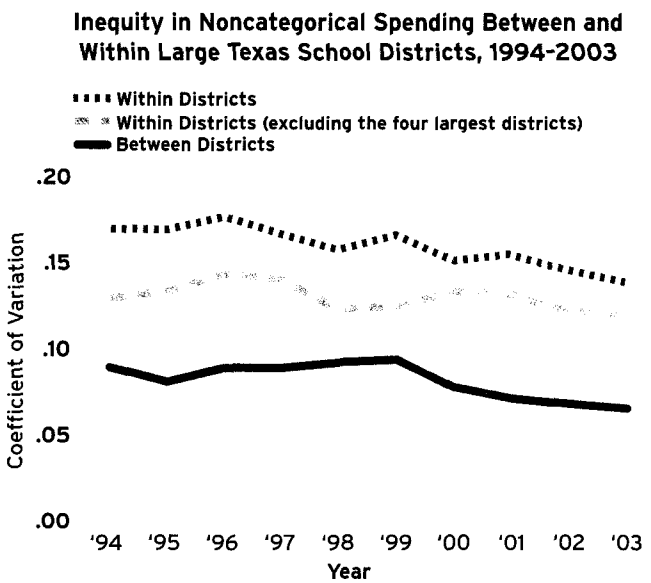
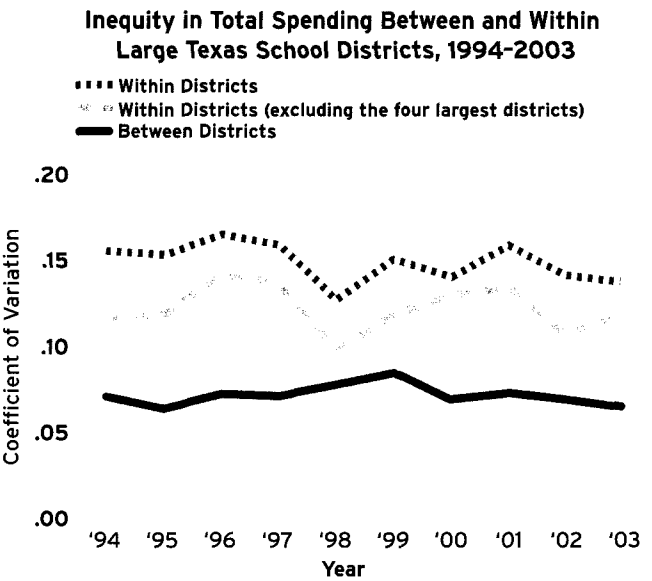


Figure 1b



Note: Large districts are those with more than 25,000 students.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations from Texas Education Agency data

In this study, we address these questions by taking an in-depth look at funding differences between and within Texas school districts over the course of a decade, from the 1993–94 to 2002–03 school years. Within Texas, we focus our attention on large school districts, those with more than 25,000 students. In 1994, the state had 29 districts with an enrollment greater than 25,000, and that number increased to 39 by 2003. These districts serve about half of all Texas public school students.

Texas's large districts are useful cases for two reasons. First, other studies of school funding equity have suggested that funding discrepancies are greatest in the largest and most urban school districts. By focusing on large districts, we are more confident that we are identifying the full extent of inequality that exists between schools. At the same time, we recognize that we may not be able to generalize our findings beyond such districts.

Second, the state of Texas has in recent years aggressively addressed funding inequalities between districts. In 1993, following a state supreme court order to equalize public school spending, the state's school finance system adopted a provision known as the "Robin Hood" law that requires property-rich districts to subsidize poorer districts within the state. Studying Texas districts and schools allows us to assess whether and how policies designed to reduce inequities between districts affected inequalities between schools within districts.

Our findings demonstrate that, at least in Texas, funding decisions within districts currently have a greater impact on a school's resources than inequalities in access to revenues across school districts. Although reforms have been successful in reducing inequalities between Texas districts, variation in funding within districts remains high. As a result, examining only data aggregated to the district level, still the standard practice in equity studies, misses much of the inequality in funding across schools.

Data and Methodology

We obtained financial and descriptive information about Texas districts with more than 25,000 students and the schools within those districts from a large database published by the Texas Education Agency. The database reports financial allocations to schools by district. For each school, we know the

AT LEAST IN TEXAS, FUNDING DECISIONS WITHIN DISTRICTS CURRENTLY HAVE A GREATER IMPACT ON A SCHOOL'S RESOURCES THAN INEQUALITIES IN ACCESS TO RESOURCES ACROSS SCHOOL DISTRICTS.

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nontargeted, or noncategorical, allocations made for each student who attends the school as well as how much the school received for five targeted groups of students: students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, students eligible for bilingual education programs, students with disabilities, gifted students, and students in vocational education programs. We exclude charter schools from our analysis, as their funding levels are not determined by the same policies that affect traditional public schools.

We first examine the differences between schools in noncategorical resources by comparing each school's per-pupil funding to the average per-pupil funding in the district. We make this comparison by calculating the ratio of each school's per-pupil noncategorical expenditure to the district's average per-pupil noncategorical expenditure. For example, if School A receives $4,000 per pupil in noncategorical funds but the district average per pupil is $5,000, then the ratio for School A is 0.8 (or 80 percent of the district average). Since the ratio compares individual school funding to the average for the district, we know that any funding differences we see are entirely the product of intradistrict rather than interdistrict variation.

Next, we compare total spending, including funds allocated specifically for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and bilingual, vocational, or gifted education. We exclude special education funds from this analysis because of large variations in funding depending on disability type.

For each district, we compute the district's average expenditure for each student-need group. For example, one district may allocate an average of $500 on top of the nontargeted allocations for each gifted student, while another district might allocate only an average of $200. This average is effectively an *implicit* spending weight unique to each district, determined by dividing the sum of all allocations made on behalf of each student type by the number of students in that category.

We then calculate a ratio, called a Weighted Student Index (WSI), of the actual funding received by each school to the funding we would expect if schools received the district's average allocation for its particular mix of students. The WSI allows us to compare per-pupil funding in schools while accounting for the types of students a school serves. A school with a WSI of 0.7 receives 70 percent of what we predict the school would be allocated, given its student population, if all the schools in the district received the same amount for each student of each type enrolled in the school.

We follow standard practice among school finance researchers who are interested in studying potential inequality at both ends of the spectrum, and calculate for each school year in our study the coefficient of variation for the differences in funding within districts. We define the coefficient of variation as the standard deviation of the population divided by its mean. Since the mean value of our two spending indexes is 1.0, the coefficient of variation is actually equivalent to the standard deviation in our analysis. The value of 0 indicates perfect equity, with larger values signaling greater disparities in the allocation of funds. Researchers studying spending differences between districts have established 0.1 as an acceptable level of equity, and we follow this convention in our analysis of between-school spending differences.

As an additional point of comparison, we also examine spending inequalities between districts. In this analysis, we adjust spending figures to reflect differences in district size and in the costs of providing education before calculating the coefficient of variation. For both the between-schools and between-districts analyses, the dollars analyzed include total operating funds from federal, state, and local governments, and use real-dollar teacher salaries.

THROUGHOUT THE DECADE WE STUDY, THE 1993–94 TO 2002–03 SCHOOL YEARS, NONCATEGORICAL FUNDING BETWEEN SCHOOLS WITHIN TEXAS DISTRICTS WAS CONSIDERABLY LESS EQUAL THAN BETWEEN DISTRICTS.

The Funding Picture

Throughout the decade we study, the 1993–94 to 2002–03 school years, noncategorical funding between schools within Texas districts was considerably less equal than between districts. The coefficient of variation calculated in the between-school analysis was consistently higher than that calculated in the between-district analysis. We removed the state's four largest urban districts from the sample and found between-school inequities were still much higher than inequities between districts.

There has been modest progress toward equity of noncategorical funds across districts and schools in Texas over the last decade (see Figure 1a). At the district level, the coefficient of variation in 1994 was 0.09, dropping to 0.07 in 2003. The coefficient of variation among schools for the 1993–94 school year was 0.17, dropping to 0.14 by the 2002–03 school year. The good news is that in 2003, the coefficient of variation across schools in 24 of Texas's 39 largest school districts was less than 0.1. The average coefficient of variation across schools, however, exceeded this benchmark in each year.

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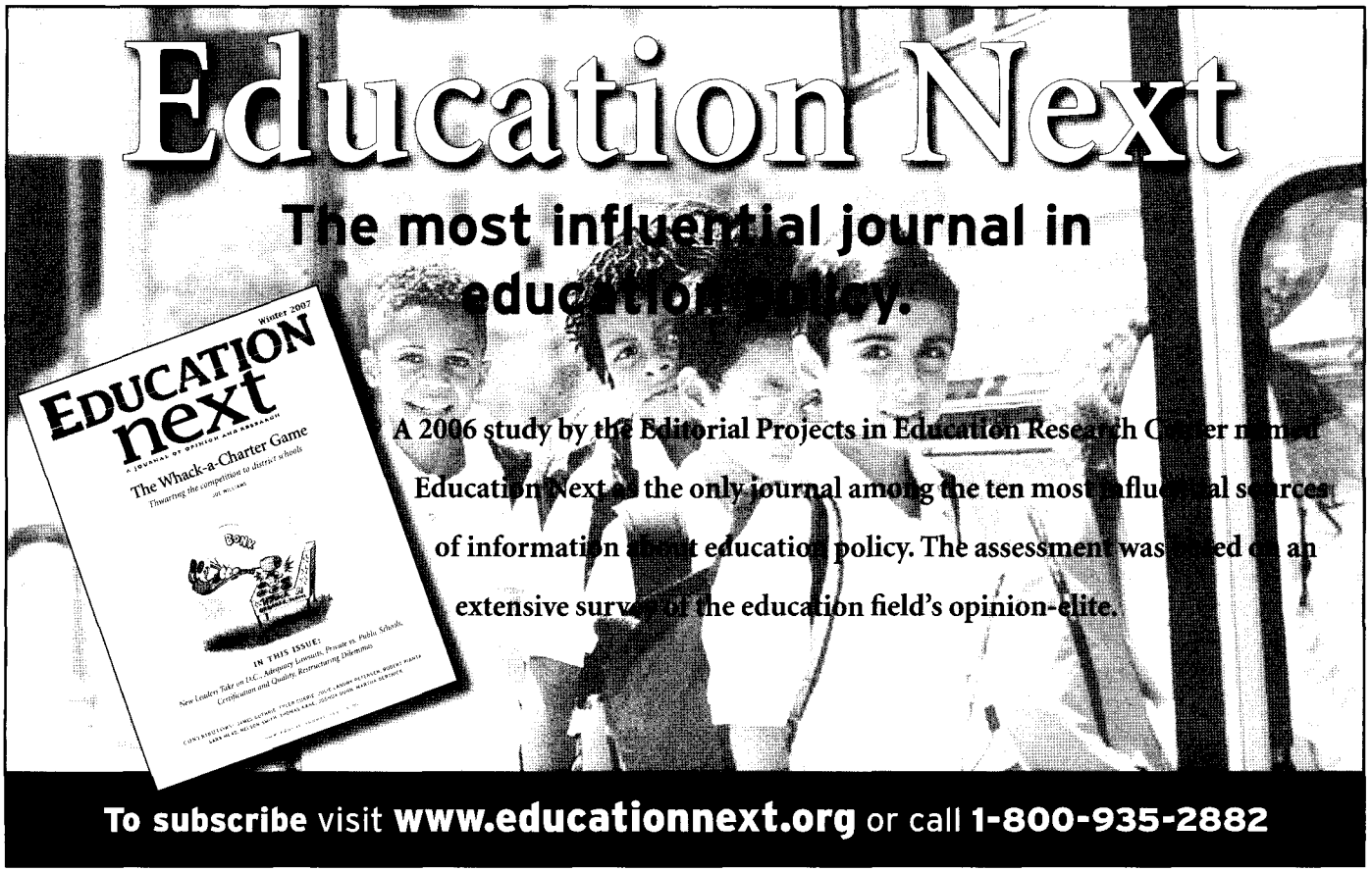
When we examined noncategorical per-pupil funding in the state's four largest school districts—Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston—the levels of inequity were even higher and each district was remarkably different from the others. In Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston, the coefficients of variation were nearly always more than 0.15, meaning that one-third of the schools in these districts had spending levels that deviated from their district's average by 15 percent (or $225,000 for a school of 500 when average spending is $3,000 per pupil). In contrast, Austin had a coefficient of variation near 0.15 for most of the decade, but dipped to the 0.1 level for three years, from 1997–98 to 1999–2000. Houston ranged between 0.2 and 0.25, except for one year, while Dallas had the highest levels of inequality, hovering around 0.3 until the 2000–01 school year, when it experienced a dramatic drop in the level of inequality in the district, indicating that a greater percentage of schools were funded at or near the district's average allocation per pupil.

During the decade we studied, Fort Worth made steady improvements toward equity in noncategorical funding across its schools, while Austin's allocations became less evenly distributed over the last five years in our study. And while there appear to be some equity gains in these four districts over the last two years of this analysis, there is no clear long-term trend toward improvement.

WHAT WE HAVEN'T MEASURED HERE ARE THE POLITICAL FORCES WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE DISTRICTS, ORGANIZATIONAL HABITS, AND DE FACTO POLICIES AT PLAY IN THE SYSTEM THAT CAN AND LIKELY DO AFFECT HOW DISTRICTS DISTRIBUTE RESOURCES AMONG SCHOOLS.

Figure 1b shows the equity picture for total funding over the period. While inequities both between and within districts have decreased over the past 10 years, there is still greater variation across schools than across districts. Taking into account resources expended for particular student types, then, does not change the patterns in noncategorical spending described above in any meaningful way.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The Impact of School Characteristics

Of course, we should not assume that all inequalities in spending between schools are necessarily perverse. District officials in Texas might point out that there are reasons aside from special student needs that could legitimately prompt uneven funding among schools. School level, school size, and academic performance are often cited as factors that shape strategic funding allocations to schools. Districts might, for example, allocate a relatively larger share of resources to high schools because they are expected to provide a diverse curriculum. Similarly, a district could be spending more on its lowest-performing schools to support improvement efforts. As discussed above, though, previous research documents spending differences resulting from less intentional factors, primarily differences in teacher salary costs due to different levels of teacher experience.

In order to investigate the role of both the intentional and unintentional factors, we explore the extent to which various school characteristics explain variation in the allocation of resources within a school district. We look at level of school (high school, middle school, or elementary school), total enrollment, percentage of the student body that is white, average experience of teachers, and school performance, as measured by the school's academic rank within the state. Using data from the 2001–02 school year for our sample of large Texas districts, we estimate the amount of variation in total per-pupil funding, measured by a school's WSI, that we can attribute to such school organizational characteristics.

We find that, as expected, high schools tend to receive more funding. On average, a high school's WSI is 0.18 higher than an elementary or middle school, indicating that high schools received 18 percent more than elementary or middle schools within the same district with similar student populations. There is some indication that the lowest-performing schools in a district have higher WSI scores, and additional analyses reveal that this pattern is concentrated among elementary schools. Unexpectedly, we do not find a clear or strong relationship between school size and WSI values. Nor do we find that schools with a larger share of white students have a meaningful increase in their WSI.

Schools with more experienced teachers and the lowest–performing schools receive slightly more funding from the district, with higher WSI by 0.01 and 0.04, respectively. In other words, these schools typically received 1 to 4 percent more than the district average, or $15,000 to $60,000 per school of 500 students in a district where the average school expenditure is $3,000 per pupil.

These findings aside, it turns out that relatively little of the differences in funding by schools is explained by these school and district characteristics. We can account for only slightly more than one-third of all the variation between schools in the same district. If spending is not strongly influenced by observable school characteristics, we have to question whether it is driven by a district strategy at all. What we haven't measured here are the political forces within and outside the district, organizational habits, and de facto policies at play in the system that can and likely do affect how districts distribute resources among schools.

Weighted Student Formulas

There have been calls for district policies that would transparently and equitably allocate district resources among schools, with the use of an explicit formula. Districts that adopt a weighted student formula (WSF) for funding schools allocate funds according to the specific student types enrolled. Spending increments, or weights, are deliberately determined for each student need. Were the districts in this analysis to allocate funds using a strict WSF system, we would not have found any inequities between schools. Each school would receive exactly the average allocation for its mix of students, and the coefficient of variation for each district would be 0.

To date, only a handful of districts have implemented WSF, and certainly not in the strict sense described here. In 1998, Houston implemented a modified version of WSF, known as student-based budgeting, in which a base amount is set per student and a percentage added for each special need, such as bilingual education. While we would not feel comfortable claiming, based on the analysis here, that student-based budgeting has been the cause of greater equity in Houston's school funding system, our findings do show that despite an initial increase in the coefficient of variation, Houston schools have over the longer term made modest improvements in equity since the strategy was put into place.

There are reasonable concerns about the consequences of WSF funding. First, district leaders may not select appropriate weights. They may choose, for instance, to allocate too little for each student in bilingual education or too much for each student in gifted programs. Second, some inequality is likely to remain even with a WSF system. WSF models typically ignore the effect of differences in teacher experience levels and, therefore, teacher salary across schools by adjusting the allocations for real salaries after the weighted formula has been applied.

Regardless of whether WSF systems are the answer, there is a clear and simple policy lesson in the experience of large Texas school districts. We should not assume that school finance reforms directed at resolving resource inequalities between school districts will ensure those resources are equitably distributed among schools and their students.

Marguerite Roza is research assistant professor, Kacey Guin is research associate, Betheny Gross is senior research associate, and Scott DeBurgomaster is research assistant at the Center for Reinventing Public Education at the Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington.

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The Odd Couple

Murray and Rothstein find some unexpected common ground

ILLUSTRATION / MARCI ROTH

Checked:
Charles Murray, "Intelligence in the Classroom," Wall Street Journal, *January 16, 2007*
Richard Rothstein, Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap *(Economic Policy Institute, 2004)*

Checked by Jay P. Greene

Welfare critic and American Enterprise Institute fellow Charles Murray and former union organizer and *New York Times* columnist Richard Rothstein don't usually have much in common. But one thing on which they agree is that there is little that schools can do to improve educational achievement, particularly for poor and minority students. Both Murray and Rothstein contend that schools face severe constraints that hinder their ability to alter student outcomes. The net effect of their arguments is to provide aid and comfort to those who would resign themselves to the educational status quo and explain away the school system's shortcomings.

The Argument against Reform

While both Murray and Rothstein argue that schools are operating under severe constraints, they disagree about what those constraints are. According to Murray, in a recent commentary in the *Wall Street Journal* and his controversial book, *The Bell Curve*, the major factor hindering school improvement is the cognitive potential of students. No matter how hard they try, Murray argues, schools cannot get students to achieve more than their intelligence will allow. As he puts it, "Our ability to improve the academic accomplishment of students in the lower half of the distribution of intelligence is severely limited. It is a matter of ceilings."

According to Rothstein, in his book *Class and Schools*, the major factor hindering school improvement is poverty and its attendant social ills. Rothstein argues that "the influence of social class characteristics is probably so powerful that schools cannot overcome it, no matter how well trained are their teachers and no matter how well designed are

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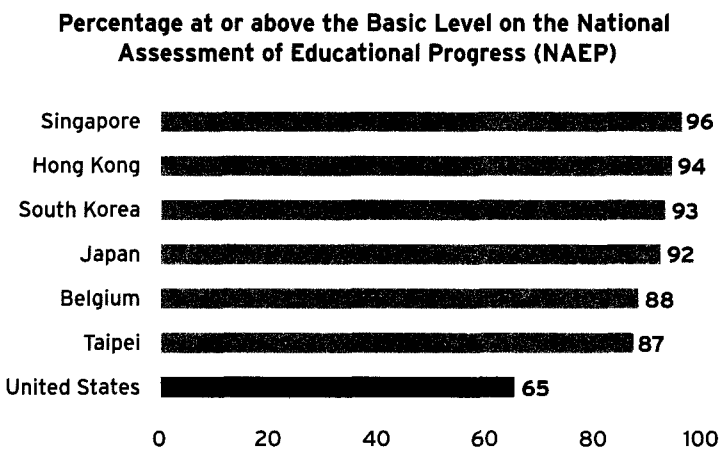
Room to Improve (Figure 1)

Top-scoring countries are much closer to having all their students reach or surpass a basic level of achievement in 8th-grade math than is the U.S.



Note: For countries other than the U.S., percentages have been estimated by linking the NAEP to student performance on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

SOURCE: Gary W. Phillips, "Linking NAEP Achievement Levels to TIMSS," American Institutes for Research, 2007

their instructional programs and climates." It is only a slight exaggeration to say that Rothstein views demography as destiny, at least in the aggregate. In his words, "No matter how competent the teacher, the academic achievement of lower-class children will, on average, almost inevitably be less than that of middle-class children."

Given their convictions about the severity of the constraints facing schools, both Murray and Rothstein have a defeatist attitude about school reform efforts. Murray warns against false hope: "Some say that the public schools are so awful that there is huge room for improvement in academic performance just by improving education. There are two problems with that position." The first problem, he suggests, is that the high percentage of students performing below the basic standard on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) may not be inconsistent with the upper bounds of achievement, given the cognitive constraints of students. "The second problem," Murray continues, "with the argument that education can be vastly improved is the false assumption that educators already know how to educate everyone and that they just need to try harder—the assumption that prompted No Child Left Behind. We have never known how to educate everyone." Accept the facts, he urges, as little can be expected from school reform.

Rothstein is similarly gloomy about the prospects for school improvement. He admits that some reforms may be well designed and have limited success, "but a careful examination of each claim that a particular school or practice has closed the race or social class achievement gap shows that the claim is unfounded." In most cases, he argues, claims of effective reforms are based on either a misanalysis of test scores or the selection of advantaged students into reform programs. His thesis is that school reform by itself can hardly make a dent in the achievement of low-income and minority students.

The argument that schools face constraints, whether cognitive or social, that significantly hinder progress has some superficial plausibility to it. We can all understand limits and the futility of trying to exceed them. If, for example, there is a constraint on the human life span, then efforts to extend life expectancy beyond that duration would obviously be unproductive. But before we give up on investing in medical research and improving our health, we might want to be convinced that we are already approaching the limits of how long humans can live. We wouldn't want to be deterred from making improvements unless we believed that we had reached the point where limitations made advances virtually impossible.

Evidence on Constraints

What evidence do Murray and Rothstein provide that we are already at the upper bounds of what schools can do? Not very much. Murray points to the fact that national gains in educational achievement, particularly for those beginning on the lower end of the distribution, have been very hard to come by in the past few decades: "If we confine the discussion to children in the lower half of the intelligence distribution (education of the gifted is another story), the overall trend of the 20th century was one of slow, hard-won improvement." If educational progress has stalled, Murray suggests, it must be a sign that we are bumping up against the cognitive limits of students.

This argument is not very compelling. The stalled growth in educational achievement could be the result of diminishing returns on reform efforts, as Murray suggests. But the stall could also have been caused by a failure to adopt new, effective reform strategies. We wouldn't want to give up on trying to improve the school system in the absence of convincing evidence that no more gains could be wrought.

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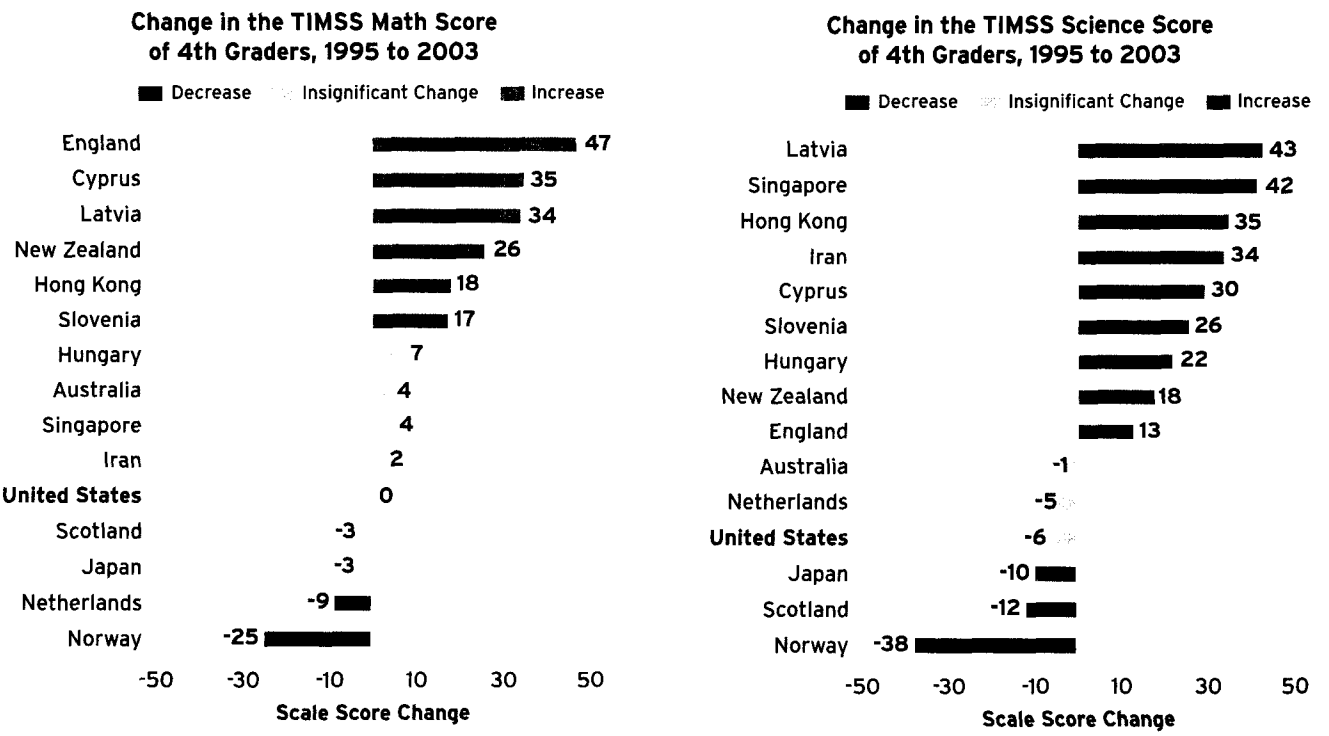
Similarly, observers of Russia would note that gains in average life expectancy have been very hard to come by in recent decades. In fact, the average age of Russians at death has declined in recent years. But it would be completely wrong to conclude from this that no reforms could be pursued to improve life expectancy among the Russian populace. Simply observing a delay in progress and pointing out that there is a limit to the human life span (it is a matter of ceilings, you know) would blind one to the obvious reforms that the nation could adopt that might improve life expectancy, such as reducing rampant alcoholism, bringing its AIDS epidemic under control, and cleaning up its environmental messes. Murray's reasoning is no more persuasive in advocating against improving Russian public health than it is against bettering American public schools.

Of course, an astute observer might also note that Russian life expectancy is considerably lower than in other countries. Unless Russians are genetically cursed with a shorter life span, shouldn't the fact that people can live longer in other countries prove that Russian life expectancy is not hitting the limit? The same could be said of American education (see Figure 1). U.S. students perform significantly worse than students in many developed countries, according to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS), and other international comparisons, trailing the leaders by more than half of a standard deviation. Shouldn't that prove that U.S. achievement has considerable room to improve before it hits the ceiling of cognitive constraints?

Unless we believe that (as Murray suggests in *The Bell Curve*) Singapore, Korea, Japan, and the Benelux countries demonstrate higher achievement because they are genetically blessed with higher IQs, then the existence of higher and still increasing achievement elsewhere in the world suggests considerable potential for school reform (see Figure 2). And we can't attribute the success of other developed countries

Significant Improvement for Some (Figure 2)

While scores for U.S. students were flat or declined, more than half of the 15 countries that participated in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 4th-grade assessment saw a significant improvement between 1995 and 2003 in the math or science scores of their students.



SOURCE: Patrick Gonzales et al., "Highlights from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2003," National Center for Education Statistics

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The fact that the entire distribution of students in other developed countries outperforms the entire distribution of U.S. students suggests that there is a difference in the effectiveness of school systems across countries that school reform could remedy.

simply to higher performance of their best students. Even their lower-achieving students outperform ours. The fact that the entire distribution of students in other developed countries outperforms the entire distribution of U.S. students suggests that there is a difference in the effectiveness of school systems across countries that school reform could remedy.

Rothstein's tack differs from Murray's in that Rothstein tries to provide evidence of the limited potential of school reform by debunking specific claims of successful efforts. For example, Rothstein contends that KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program), a network of charter schools that have produced impressive results with disadvantaged students, isn't as effective as it seems. KIPP's success, he argues, is largely attributable to the selection of more advantaged students into their schools, the investment of significantly greater resources, and the unusual motivation of their staff. These sources of KIPP's success, he suggests, cannot be replicated on a larger scale, so imitating or expanding KIPP cannot meaningfully reform the school system as a whole.

He makes similar arguments about how efforts to improve teacher quality, instructional approaches like Success for All, and high-expectation techniques practiced by educators like Jaime Escalante and Rafe Esquith are not promising models for reform because their success is due to the selection of students or other factors that cannot be replicated on a broader scale. By undercutting these reform strategies and presenting evidence on the powerful influence of social class on student achievement, Rothstein hopes to convince us that we can expect little from focusing on reform within the school system.

Leaving aside the merits of Rothstein's critique of these specific reforms, the general problem with Rothstein's argument is that he attempts to demonstrate the limited potential of all school reforms by attacking a handful of them. So he picks a few prominent reform models that have not demonstrated large gains using the most rigorous evaluation techniques. Mind you, he doesn't produce any evidence to demonstrate that these reforms are ineffective; he only raises plausible doubts given their lack of convincing proof.

But what about reforms that have produced significant gains for students, according to evaluations adhering to the highest social science standards? He doesn't address those. Studies have evaluated several reforms using random-assignment research designs, also used in most medical experiments, in which subjects are randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Random assignment helps eliminate concerns that program outcomes result from the selection of students, to which Rothstein attributes the apparent success of many reform claims.

Expanding school choice has been shown to improve achievement for minority students by about one-third of a standard deviation after a few years of intervention, according to seven of eight random-assignment evaluations (the eighth showed positive but statistically insignificant effects). The famous Tennessee STAR random assignment study evaluated class size reduction, which also produced about a one-third of a standard deviation improvement in achievement for minority students. The What Works Clearinghouse, which the U.S. Department of Education operates, lists more than a dozen school interventions that have shown significant effectiveness in rigorous evaluations, several of which used random assignment.

We don't just have evidence of effective school reforms from well-studied pilot programs; we also have such evidence from large-scale initiatives that have produced improvements for low-income and minority students. For example, when Massachusetts began to require passage of a 10th-grade exam for a regular diploma, the percentage of African American and Hispanic students passing more than doubled. When Florida threatened to offer vouchers to students at chronically

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failing public schools, those schools made significant gains. These achievements in Massachusetts and Florida aren't simply improvements on state tests, which could be subject to manipulation, but are confirmed by progress on national tests administered in those states.

We may not all agree on which reforms have been proven effective, but we could all agree that at least some of these reforms, perhaps used in combination, could make a large difference in the academic achievement of low-income and minority students. To dismiss the potential of significant change through school reform is to dismiss a large collection of rigorous social science and the bulk of experience.

Rothstein may feel justified in downplaying hopes for school reform because of the evidence he presents on the large influence social class has on academic achievement. He is entirely correct in observing the strong evidence showing that family income, parental education, family composition, housing stability, and other social factors have a substantial effect on student achievement. But it does not follow that we should therefore hold little hope for results from school reform.

Similarly, it is well established that health behaviors, such as diet, exercise, smoking, and drinking, have a very large influence on health outcomes. But almost no one uses this evidence to reduce our expectations for health improvements from medical interventions. We still (rightly) believe that doctors can and should make a difference in our health. Why shouldn't we expect the same from teachers, even if we acknowledge the strong influence of factors outside their control?

Comments in Context

Murray and Rothstein are likely to contend that I have made a caricature of their views. They can point to portions of their writings that affirm their commitment to school reform. For example, Murray writes, "This is not to say that American public schools cannot be improved. Many of them, especially in large cities, are dreadful." And Rothstein observes, "Readers should not misinterpret this emphasis as implying that better schools are not important, or that school improvement will not make a contribution to narrowing the achievement gap."

But these are throwaway lines, completely at odds with the clear, overall thrust of their arguments. For example, Murray immediately follows his acknowledgment that there might be some potential in school reform with a stern warning not to expect much: "But even the best schools under the best conditions cannot repeal the limits on achievement set by limits on intelligence."

Rothstein makes more concessions to the possibility of progress in schools, but his pessimism about reform is also patently obvious. Although his book contains a chapter of suggested reforms that might help close the achievement gap, reforms within schools are noticeably absent. The chapter does include the need to integrate schools, which is not presented as a reform in how schools operate but as a change in the societal composition of schools. The chapter also advocates addressing income inequality, providing stable housing, expanding access to health clinics, and strengthening preschool, afterschool, and summer school programs. The only in-school reform that Rothstein mentions is the need to stop invoking slogans like "no excuses" to raise expectations for results because it undermines teacher morale. He adds, "'no excuses' slogans provide ideological respectability for those wanting to hold schools accountable for inevitable failure." With phrases like "inevitable failure" and a complete focus on out-of-school reforms, it is

We may not all agree on which reforms have been proven effective, but we could all agree that at least some reforms, perhaps used in combination, could make a large difference in the academic achievement of low-income and minority students.

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clear that Rothstein believes we can expect little from school reform.

Politics of Inaction

Both Murray and Rothstein have large constituencies for their views. Murray's following is less visible, largely because his views on these matters lost respectability in polite company after the publication of *The Bell Curve*. But don't let his low profile on this issue fool you into believing that there aren't a significant number of influential people who share Murray's perspective. Believing that race and class differences in education outcomes can largely be explained by differences in cognitive limitations reinforces many people's private prejudices. Murray draws strength from his marginalized status, playing the role of the man brave enough to tell us the truth. Unfortunately, not every heretic is Galileo; sometimes they are just cranks.

Rothstein has a much larger and more vocal constituency. Everyone wishing to shift attention (and blame) away from schools pays heed to Rothstein's arguments. Saying that we cannot expect significant progress in schools until we first address a host of social ills outside of school is a recipe for inaction. Waiting for society to fix all of its injustices before we can really fix schools is like waiting for Godot. It will never come.

Not surprisingly, the teacher unions don't mind waiting. For example, the February 2006 issue of *NEA Today* features an article by David Berliner, the former head of the American Educational Research Association and professor at Arizona State University, that repeats Rothstein's argument with greater force and fewer reservations: "So why, when we have as much credible research making connections between poverty and school success, do we keep looking for other answers? (For example, it must be the low expectations of teachers!) What's surprising is, in the face of that research, we still concentrate our attention and resources on what happens inside low-performing schools when the real problems are outside those schools." In an appearance on C-SPAN, Berliner observed that students spend only 1,000 hours a year in school and another 5,000 waking hours with their families and friends. How are schools supposed to counter these larger influences, he wondered? Of course, we spend even less time each year with our doctor than we do in school, but we still have very high expectations for medicine to make a difference.

Saying that we cannot expect significant progress in schools until we first address a host of social ills outside of school is a recipe for inaction. Waiting for society to fix all its injustices before we can really fix schools is like waiting for Godot. It will never come.

And to whom does Berliner credit his ideas? "These musings could have been written also by Jean Anyon, Bruce Biddle, Greg Duncan, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Gary Orfield, Richard Rothstein, and many others whose work I admire and from whom I borrow." So Rothstein's views reflect a broad and deep tradition within education circles. Preceding him are the likes of Jean Anyon, for example, who writes in the *Teachers College Record*, "The structural basis for failure in inner-city schools is political, economic, and cultural, and must be changed before meaningful school improvement projects can be successfully implemented. Educational reforms cannot compensate for the ravages of society."

To be sure, Anyon, Berliner, and Rothstein are right to warn us that social forces play a significant role in educational achievement. And Murray is right that at some point cognitive limits do place a ceiling on student outcomes. But without strong evidence that ours are the best of all possible schools, we should reject attempts to shift attention from efforts to improve schools. Recognizing constraints is not the same as being paralyzed by them.

Jay P. Greene is professor of education reform, University of Arkansas, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, and a contributing editor of Education Next.

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What begat the achievement gap?

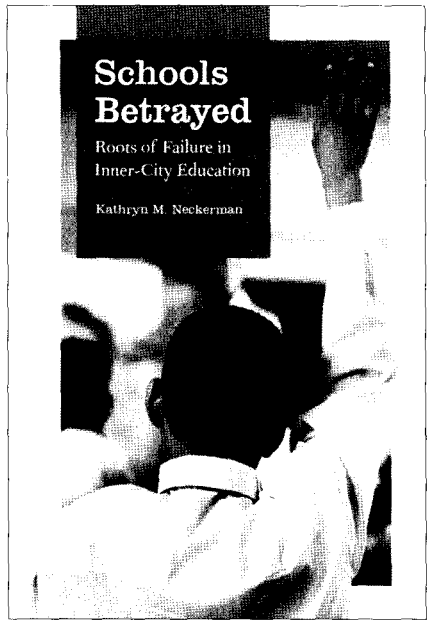
History of Chicago schools provides few answers

Schools Betrayed: Roots of Failure in Inner-city Education

By Kathryn M. Neckerman

University of Chicago Press, 2007, $29; 252 pages.

As reviewed by Nathan Glazer



The most urgent issue in American education for the last half century has been the failure of large numbers of African American children and older students to complete their education and reach an average level of competence. It is 10 years since the publication of *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, the collection of studies edited by Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, in which the education deficit was labeled starkly as the single most important obstacle to black advancement. Progress since then has not been marked.

At the beginning of *Schools Betrayed*, Kathryn Neckerman cites psychologist Kenneth Clark, who 40 years ago wrote in *Dark Ghetto*, "The dominant and disturbing fact about ghetto schools is that the teachers and the students regard each other as adversaries. Under these conditions the teachers are reluctant to teach and the students resist learning." Clark's research had been cited in the key Supreme Court decision banning state-imposed segregation in public schools, but one suspects on the basis of this quotation that he was already doubtful that desegregation alone would solve the problem of an adequate education for urban blacks. Not, of course, that desegregation was simple: it turned out to be awfully complicated and has never been substantially achieved in northern and midwestern cities.

Neckerman explores the origins of the black-white education gap in Chicago between 1900 and 1960, and for half of its length her book reads like a detective story. She examines three explanations of why inner-city schools failed blacks, and to each she says, no, that's not it.

The first is the economic decline of northern and midwestern cities, which heightened financial pressures on the schools. In a word, they simply didn't have enough money to deal properly with growing numbers of poor and black students. The second is racial barriers to employment in the North, "more subtle but no less real" than in the South. The third possibility is the rise of an "oppositional culture," in which "academic effort [was framed] as a betrayal of racial identity—'acting white.'"

On the issue of resources, she documents rising expenditure for the schools (in 1980 dollars) during this entire period; rising salaries for teachers, particularly in the 1950s; and declining numbers of students per teacher. Her conclusion is that "the urban decline thesis cannot by itself account for the problems of inner-city schooling that emerged...in the 1940's and 1950's."

She notes that during most of the first half of the 20th century the issue in the Chicago schools was European immigrant children. Early on, black students had an advantage in enrollment over immigrant students, and a small advantage in graduation from high school. Immigrant parents often opposed continuing education for their children, as status could be earned in their communities through hard work and employment in small business. There were also routes to achievement through the labor union office, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Democratic Party, all hardly available for blacks.

In the postwar period she documents a widening education gap between black and immigrant students. Did insufficient or poor jobs for blacks give them less reason to stay in school? Neckerman points to the opportunities in the public sector and the civil service, where there was much less discrimination, and in the independent professions, namely law, medicine, dentistry, and the clergy, which "offered a chance to avoid some of the discrimination that private-sector employees faced," and all of which required education. She does not dispute the widespread degree and depth of discrimination, but holds that in this situation education offered some advantage, some hope: "The economic returns to education...was [sic] similar for black and immigrant workers." Yet the gap in taking advantage of educational opportunities grew.

We can measure urban decline and labor market discrimination to some extent through quantitative research. Tackling the "oppositional culture" explanation is harder. Neckerman asks why an oppositional culture should have arisen, as in black communities education was almost the only route to achievement. (She does not refer to the underworld,

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sports, and entertainment as alternatives routes to status in black communities, but surely they played a role in shaping attitudes toward education.)

So where does Neckerman find the answer? Her research into the Chicago schools leads her to three theories of her own.

First is the growth of segregation in the Chicago schools. Clearly, this was related to immigration from the South and the resulting areas of black concentration, which were shaped by residential and labor market discrimination. At the least, the Chicago school authorities countenanced this development, but in response to community pressures they also facilitated it through school assignment and school districting. She writes that "the public schools lost legitimacy in the eyes of the black community."

The second is the failure of vocational education to do much for black children. Vocational education began as an effort to connect to the world of work those children not headed for college, but in time it diverged between a higher track that afforded training that led to jobs, and a lower track that was simply an alternative to expected academic failure. Access to the top tier required at least basic numerical and language skills. She writes that vocational education "offers one example of how black students could be disadvantaged by policies that were ostensibly race neutral." One reason blacks were denied the upper tier was that discriminatory trade unions would prevent them from using the skills they learned.

The third is that the Chicago schools' programs of remedial education, which developed during this period, were neither sufficient nor well enough funded. The black schools were worst off, overcrowded, and with large classes: "...the schools' race-neutral remedial policies had racially disparate effects, because they were implemented in an environment that—both inside and outside the school—was profoundly unequal."

Neckerman returns in her last chapter to Kenneth Clark's quotation and the problem of "authority and engagement." This theme will be familiar and sad to school observers. The head of the Chicago Teachers College said in 1940, the black "is warned to beware of the white man and many of his attitudes...are colored by this caution. Teachers 'pick on him' not because he misbehaves but because he is black.... The Negro boy is drilled on what his rights are. Every teacher...knows that the first reaction of a Negro when she threatens to punish him is to say, 'The law won't let you hit me.'" All this is long before the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s and the expansion of the rights of school children.

This volume is a deep and full exploration of the schools of our second largest city, as Chicago was during this period, drawing on bodies of research that go back a hundred years. I find Neckerman's distinctions, between the explanations she finds less supported in the research and those she eventually alights on, less sharp than she does. Both sets are so dependent on the web of discrimination in employment, residence, and status that it is hard to differentiate among them.

Certainly, theories rooted in discrimination have lost a good deal of explanatory power in the years since the period she explores. Still, our progress in dealing with the education gap has not been encouraging in the last decade or so. Nevertheless there is no alternative to continued effort. Neckerman's sober and intensive study offers us little new guidance, and the only available answer is more of the same, on a wider and deeper scale.

Nathan Glazer is professor of education and sociology emeritus at Harvard University.

Food for thought

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Bum Rap

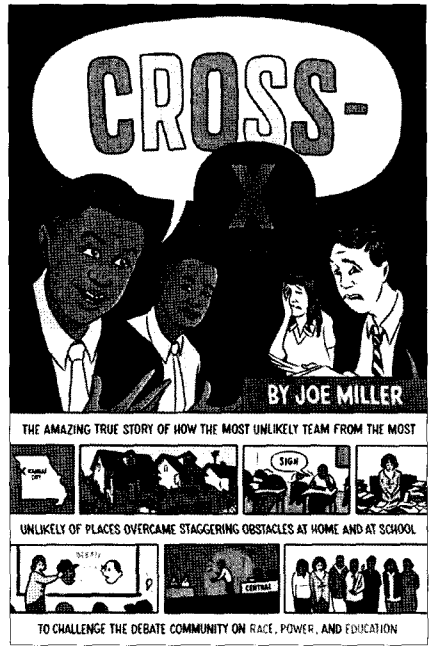
On the debate circuit with Central High

Cross-X: The Amazing True Story of How the Most Unlikely Team from the Most Unlikely of Places Overcame Staggering Obstacles at Home and at School to Challenge the Debate Community on Race, Power, and Education

By Joe Miller

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006, $26; 480 pages.

As reviewed by Diane Ravitch


CROSS-
BY JOE MILLER
THE AMAZING TRUE STORY OF HOW THE MOST UNLIKELY TEAM FROM THE MOST
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A genre of books and movies emerged in the past generation that portrays an inspired teacher who miraculously transforms a group of hard-luck students into champions. Outsiders say it can't be done, but this great teacher does it. One thinks of Jaime Escalante, who taught calculus to poor Hispanic kids at Garfield High School in Los Angeles and was celebrated in a book by Jay Mathews and in a movie called *Stand and Deliver*. Or the movie about and books by Erin Gruwell, a writing teacher in Long Beach, California (see cultured, page 87), or the books by Rafe Esquith, who teaches Shakespeare to 5th graders in central Los Angeles.

The story has a familiar line: No one thinks much of these students; their life prospects are limited. Once they enter the classroom of the inspired teacher, however, something wonderful happens. Despite initial obstacles, the students amaze everyone with their achievements. The music reaches a crescendo, the story ends.

Cross-X is not that story, although the reader is led to believe that it will be. An assortment of students, all poor and black, join the debate team at Central High School in Kansas City, Missouri. Most of them speak the argot of the 'hood, not standard English. The coach, Jane Rinehart, who is white, is set up to be the miracle worker. We learn about the impoverished lives of the students and the struggles of their families. We expect that from this unpromising material, Coach Rinehart will fashion a championship debating team.

But the conventional story line never happens. The first inkling of the counternarrative occurs when the coach tells her recruits that the greatest joy of debate is to make the other team cry. Early on, it becomes clear that the book is implicitly (and often explicitly) a narrative about racism, oppression, segregation, and poverty. The reader picks up the theme early on, when Coach Rinehart tells the debaters to discard their infantile notions that the purpose of education is (as a student put it) "to give you a chance to be what you want to be" or "to make money." No, says the coach, the purpose of schooling is to perpetuate the status quo. She tells them that "one hundred families control 80 percent of the wealth," and none of them went to Central High. She is not one to encourage belief in the American dream of opportunity.

Later in the book, the author, journalist Joe Miller, decides to stop observing and reporting on the story and to become part of it; he grows so intrigued with the game of debate and so deeply involved in the lives of the students that he becomes an actor in the story, watching as they engage in risky personal behavior, then joining up as a debate coach.

Miller describes the many debates that the team from Central High participates in, often in mind-numbing detail. Sometimes they win, sometimes they lose, but Miller leads the reader to believe that racism is behind many, if not most, of their losses to teams from prestigious suburban public schools and elite private schools. Large portions of the book consist of the students' conversations, which are usually so studded with expletives and sloppy language that it is hard to imagine how these students were able to succeed on the debate circuit against better-educated kids. To read this book, one must have a high tolerance for four-letter words and various forms of misbehavior, some of it involving illicit drugs. The reader also needs a great deal of patience, as the book is twice as long as it needs to be.

Just when the reader thinks it is impossible to endure another detailed description of yet another debate, Miller has an epiphany. He discovers Paulo Freire and *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and shares it with his young charges. The light goes on in his head and in theirs, too. The students suddenly realize that debate is a form of institutionalized racism, and they change their presentation at debates to raps about racism and

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oppression. Some opposing teams are insulted, but the kids from Central win a few competitions with their new format.

In the background of the story looms Central High, a depressing institution with low achievement, low aspirations, gangs, fights, and a prisonlike atmosphere. Miller briefly relates the tale of the $2 billion court-ordered desegregation plan in the mid-1980s for Kansas City, in which teachers' salaries were raised, class sizes slashed, and beautiful facilities created. A new Central was built at a cost of $32 million, with special programs in computer technology and classical Greek studies. The federal court hoped that the low-performing, segregated district would have such splendid facilities and programs that suburban whites would enroll and that test scores would rise along with integration. Although Central attracted some white students, it remained a predominantly black school. And at Central High School and in the Kansas City district, achievement remained low, despite the substantial additional spending by the state of Missouri.

Certainly, much more should be written about what went wrong in Kansas City. But Joe Miller's book is not the place for that sort of in-depth analysis. Miller is outraged by the poverty and terrible circumstances of the young men (they are all young men) that he befriends. He frequently contrasts the dismal material circumstances of their lives with those of affluent white students who live elsewhere. He rages against racism, poverty, and inequality, which he believes (like Coach Rinehart, Paulo Freire, and another hero, Jonathan Kozol) is designed into the American social system.

At the end of the book, after the debaters begin presenting their arguments about racism in rap format, he happily reports that the debate circuit has begun to take notice. Somehow, Coach Joe Miller has become the center of the story, not Coach Rinehart. He sees hope that a revolution will occur, as Jonathan Kozol predicted in a visit to Central, after the affluent white oppressors in privileged schools are enlightened by their encounters with the rapping Kansas City debate team.

One wonders: Will those privileged white students lead the revolution that Miller, Freire, and Kozol long for? Or would the students at Central be better off believing in the American dream, the one that says that hard work, clean living, and a good education is the key to rising out of poverty?

Diane Ravitch is research professor of education, New York University, and a member of the Koret Task Force at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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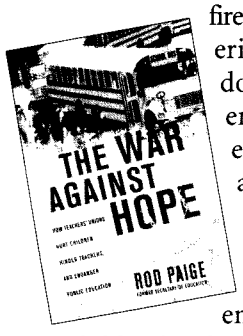
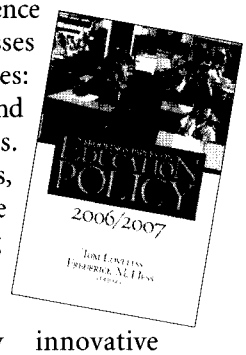
BOOK ALERT



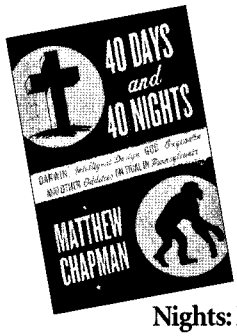
The War Against Hope: How Teachers' Unions Hurt Children, Hinder Teachers, and Endanger Public Education. Rod Paige (Thomas Nelson).

How do teachers' unions stifle school reform? Rod Paige counts the ways: they refuse to allow great teachers to receive higher pay; they prevent incompetent teachers from being fired; they pressure maverick teachers to stop doing things differently; they fight to ensure that teachers are not evaluated by supervisors or by using test-score data; they don't want parents to choose their children's schools; they don't want children to be allowed to leave failing schools; they attack charter schools; and they rally to ensure that school board elections are won by those who share their views. Paige, former U.S. secretary of education and superintendent of schools in Houston, pulls no punches in this book. He seeks to unmask the goals and actions of teachers' unions in an effort to demonstrate that the unions are the biggest reason why our education system produces such disappointing results. (Not much attention is paid in this book to other obstacles to change.) But since unions are just doing their job by taking care of their own interests, Paige writes, it is up to the rest of us—parents, school boards, state school chiefs, think tanks, institutions of higher education, journalists, and Congress—to challenge them when necessary. Unions will only change when we force them to, and Paige aims to show readers how to make that happen.



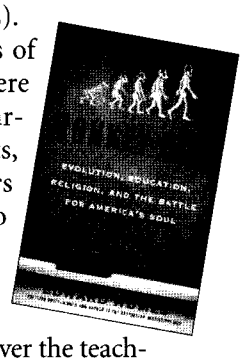
Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2006–2007. Tom Loveless and Frederick M. Hess, editors (Brookings Institution Press).

This conference volume addresses two big issues: smaller classes and smaller schools. Its ten chapters, written by some of the leading lights in education scholarship, employ innovative methodologies to examine the costs, benefits, and tradeoffs of these popular reform strategies. The punch line, as reported by Loveless and Hess, is that smaller classes and smaller schools "hold promise in certain times and places," but that implementing them at large scale "is likely to prove shortsighted and wasteful." The reasons are rather obvious, if illuminated by the volume's research papers: Smaller classes require more teachers, which makes improving teacher quality a lot tougher; both reforms require retrofitted facilities, a hugely expensive undertaking. Yet scale is not unimportant. Thomas Dee and his colleagues find greater parental involvement in small rural schools, for instance, and Douglas Ready and Valerie Lee identify serious shortcomings in huge schools and classrooms. If policymakers, philanthropists, and educators wade through these sometimes technical papers and take their conclusions seriously, the medium classes and medium schools movement should be right around the corner.



40 Days and 40 Nights: Darwin, Intelligent Design, God, OxyContin, and Other Oddities on Trial in Pennsylvania. Matthew Chapman (HarperCollins).

Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion, and the Battle for America's Soul. Edward Humes (HarperCollins).



The authors of these books were among the journalists, activists, and onlookers who flooded into Dover, Pennsylvania, in 2005 for the latest legal skirmish over the teaching of creationism in the public schools. The Dover School Board had ordered that students be alerted of "gaps" in evolutionary theory and of the availability of a supplemental textbook advancing the rival notion of intelligent design. The ensuing trial unmasked the overtly religious intentions of the board and of the leading organizations promoting intelligent design, not to mention the unscientific character of the theory itself. Indeed, so decisive was the evidence that Chapman, a screenwriter with a "slight antipathy toward certain aspects of religion" (and who also happens to be Charles Darwin's great-great-grandson), concludes that creationism in all its forms should be taught in science classes nationwide through the lens of the Dover dispute. With a filmmaker's eye for detail, Chapman presents a blow-by-blow account of the trial interspersed with interviews with the major players. Humes's book is more authoritative in tone and comprehensive in

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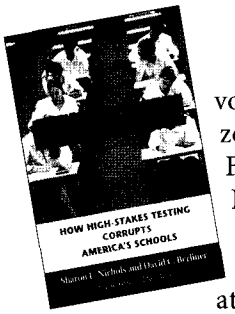
BOOK ALERT continued

scope, reviewing parallel battles on the Kansas State Board of Education and the history of church-state conflicts involving science instruction and religion. Both books rightly decry the marginalization of evolution in biology textbooks and state standards. Their strident warnings about future intrusions of religion into the classroom, however, ring somewhat hollow given the outcome of the case.

Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools. Sharon L. Nichols and David C. Berliner (Harvard Education Press).

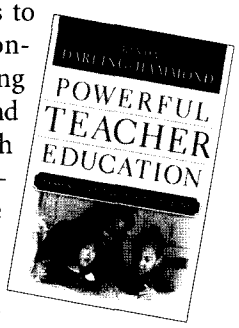
The antitesting crowd can barely contain its excitement over this latest



volume from Arizona State's David Berliner and Sharon Nichols, a Berliner protégé now at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Other than usefully reminding readers of "Campbell's Law," namely, that "the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures," this is a nearly unrelieved tirade against high-stakes testing in general and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in particular. A couple of pages are devoted to two not-bad alternatives, a British-style inspectorate and end-of-course exams. But 99 percent of what's here boils down to an attack not only on NCLB and high-stakes testing, but also on results-based educational accountability and external accountability in general.

Powerful Teacher Education: Lessons from Exemplary Programs. Linda Darling-Hammond (Jossey-Bass).

Linda Darling-Hammond sets out to combat the "myth" that "good teacher education programs are virtually nonexistent." She builds the book around the findings from case studies of seven "exemplary" institutions and proceeds to distill sweeping conclusions regarding teacher education and credentialing. Much of the volume proceeds from the assumption that the author and her case-study contributors know good preparation when they see it. There is some modestly interesting survey data in chapter 3 that makes the case that teachers from the model programs feel more confident than their peers and that their principals are relatively high on them as well. Several recommendations for improving teacher preparation seem sensible, including better linking of preparation to practice, targeting investment in the most promising candidates, and selecting and promoting teacher educators on the basis of mentoring and clinical skills. The policy recommendations are more predictable; those acquainted with the author's oeuvre won't find any surprises. In fact, the author is listed an astonishing 45 times in her book's index!



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Urban Hero

Wrong role for school teachers

As reviewed by David Steiner

Freedom Writers
Viewed April 14, 2007

The movie scene has become familiar—the American high school class close to rioting, the racial tensions boiling, the curses flying across the room—and then, the breakthrough moment. Through an inspired gesture, the teacher connects: he uses an apple, she uses karate, he the doping of a mouse, she a student-drawn cartoon. The connection made, the trajectory is clear. The classroom gradually becomes a haven, a precious space of bonding and learning set against a sea of social violence and family tragedy. The teacher as hero or heroine pays a price—loss of a less heroic lover or spouse, disdain and opposition from colleagues and school administrators (always portrayed as cynical and patronizing), even, in one case, martyrdom for the cause.

Too often formulaic, these are not great movies. In *Freedom Writers*, the latest product of the genre, Hilary Swank looks continually uncomfortable in the leading role. Based on events in the 1990s at a high school in Long Beach, California, the movie tells how a teacher evokes the Holocaust to connect her students with the universality of human suffering. The result is a life-changing experience in which her Hispanic and African American students and the Jewish Holocaust survivors they encounter bear witness to a common humanity and hope. As educators in a pluralist democracy, we are tempted to forgive the film's weaknesses and celebrate the heroic teacher as she fights for the souls of her students. *Stand and Deliver, Dangerous Minds*, *187*, and now *Freedom Writers* continually tap into our need to believe in the narrative of the "great teacher," capable of saving students in need. (*187*, alone in the genre in lacking final hope, was a commercial failure.)

The exemplar of the great teacher, past and present, is a staple of Western European culture. Among the many, Socrates remains the seminal figure. In the 12th century, Abelard, known to us today through his tragic love affair with Heloise, became a legendary teacher, gathering students from throughout Europe. A century later, St. Thomas Aquinas, offering lessons at the University of Paris, became recognized as the master teacher of Catholicism. In the 16th century, the Maharal of Prague, Judah Loew ben Bezalel, founded the Talmudic Academy known as the Klausen; he defined Torah and kabbalistic studies for generations. Centuries later, as rector of the Nuremberg Gymnasium, Hegel would begin his epochal rethinking of the history of philosophy, a project Heidegger would continue in Freiburg, achieving, in the words of Hannah Arendt, "the kingship among teachers."

In the much briefer history of the United States, the teacher as a great cultural or philosophical voice is largely absent. Leo Strauss, whose influence is now hotly debated by analysts of American foreign policy, was European-born. John Dewey is a rare example of an educator whose thinking about pedagogy and engagement with broader political issues achieved national status, but he was not a great teacher. Writing about France, my father could cite the high school teacher Émile-Auguste Chartier, commonly known simply as "Alain," as "a commanding presence in European moral and intellectual history" from 1906 to the late 1940s; there are no American equivalents.

Moreover, American literature has little place for the great teacher: in Washington Irving and J.D. Salinger, the schoolteacher is largely weak and useless. Whereas in Europe, great teaching is grounded in the power of their ideas, in America it is a matter of ideals: the lone warrior who overcomes the odds, who triumphs over the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of the urban public school. The heroes depicted—Jaime Escalante (*Stand and Deliver*), LouAnne Johnson (*Dangerous Minds*), and Erin Gruwell (*Freedom Writers*)—shine against backcloths of deprivation and despair. This is an ironic form of heroism, dependent as it is on conditions for which we all bear continuing responsibility. Heroism is surely a virtue. To depend on public school teachers to display it is not.

David Steiner is dean of the School of Education at Hunter College, CUNY. He is former director of arts education at the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C.

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Baby, Think It Over

Technology meets abstinence education

BY PETER MEYER

The baby is screaming. My wife is tapping its back. It keeps screaming. She shakes it.
More high-pitched baby screams.
Finally, I shout, "Throw it in the freezer!"
My wife laughs. She turns the little black doll over and fiddles with, yes, the key.
I was first introduced to Baby Think It Over® several years ago, when the 13-year-old babysitter arrived carrying—my God!—a baby and promptly tripped on the steps, flinging the little bundle onto the bluestone sidewalk. I gasped. The babysitter screamed. The bundle went Waaah!

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

My son's school paid $300 apiece for a dozen or so of these computer-assisted dolls. According to his teacher, Ms. Ferraro, they are meant to teach prepubescent kids how difficult it is to take care of a baby and thus make them "think it over." And for the past few years it has been a ritual of fall to see 8th graders in the supermarket, in church, at football games, carrying their "little babies," which Waaah! at the appropriately inappropriate times and embarrass the kid.

But this is serious business. On the Baby Think It Over web site (www.realityworks.com), you'd think you were shopping for a new car:

"As of July 1, 2007 Realityworks will discontinue support for older models…Standard Baby (Generation 4) released in 1996, Realistic Head Support Baby (Generation 5) released in 1998, Original RealCare Baby released in 1999.... Please consider the Trade-In Program.... We'll give you a $50 discount toward the purchase of the latest Realityworks infant simulator."

You can't make this stuff up.

The students must take the "babies" for a weekend, everywhere they go. They fill out a chart, noting when it cried, what the student was doing, how long it cried, how the student felt, and how others were affected. My son was reading a book (good for him) at 3:46 p.m. when the baby started crying. "I felt fine," he wrote.

The next entry is in my wife's handwriting. Crying started at 4:55 and ended at 4:55. And what was she doing at the time? "Talking to our dog." How did she feel? "Anxious." Her next entry, 20 minutes later, is "Key breaks."

She elaborated in her own journal (I refused to keep one): "In order to let our son attend his first snowboarding night with the City Youth Department, I volunteered to babysit. Trying to stop the baby's crying, I broke the plastic key. I drove to the Middle School and threw myself on your mercy."

She got a new key (for $6), and our son took over later that night. He made another dozen or so entries; he was, variously, sleeping, riding in the car, watching TV, sleeping, sleeping, sleeping, brushing teeth, when the baby cried, and he always felt "fine." The crying never affected anyone else except once, in church. "It scared my dad," he noted.

After my son turned in his baby, he came home from school dejected, with a note. "I had it 66 hours. Let neck down 13 times. 5 neglects. 2 rough handling. Let cry 37 minutes."

My wife was incensed. She penned "an addendum" to her journal. "I think that a piece of the missing broken key could be a cause of the result. Please advise."

I could have advised: a piece of broken logic got stuck in the educational cerebellum.

Later that year, on the way to my son's 8th-grade graduation, we stopped at the hospital to visit his classmate, Katlyn, and her new baby boy. "Did he come with a key?" I asked. She laughed, beaming, as any new mother would. Of some 80 girls in the class, 4 were pregnant that year. They were barely 14.

I recently called Ms. Ferraro to ask how things were going. She explained that she probably wouldn't get any new babies. "I was chaperoning at a football game, and these kids had the babies in shopping bags. They had figured out how to put duct tape over the babies' heads and on to their chests so the head wouldn't move."

I didn't have the heart to tell her that some kids play football with the babies.

Peter Meyer, former news editor of Life *magazine, is a freelance writer and a contributing editor of* Education Next.

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